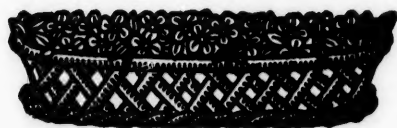




# PRISONERS & CAPTIVES

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# Prisoners and Captives

## CHAPTER I

### DEAD WATERS

THE march of civilization has turned its steps aside from certain portions of the world. Day by day some southern waters find themselves more and more forsaken. The South Atlantic, the high-road of the world at one time, is now a by-lane.

One afternoon, some years ago, the copper-bright rays of a cruel sun burnt the surface of the ocean. The stillness of the atmosphere was phenomenal, even in the latitudes where a great calm reigns from month to month. It is almost impossible to present to northern eyes this picture of a southern sea gleaming beneath a sun which had known no cloud for weeks; impossible to portray the brilliant monotony of it all with any degree of reality to the imagination of those who only know our white-flecked heavens. Those who live up north in the cool "fifties" can scarcely realize the state of an atmosphere where

the sun rises day by day, week in week out, unclouded from the straight horizon; sails right overhead, and at last sinks westward undimmed by thinnest vapour. Month after month, year after year, ay! century after century, this day's work is performed. The scorching orb of light rises at the same monotonous hour and sets, just as he did when this world was one vast ocean, with but one ship sailing on it.

From the dark mysterious depths of the ocean wavering ripples, mounting in radiation to the surface, broke at times the blue uniformity of its bosom. Occasionally a delicate nautilus drifted along before some unappreciable breath, presently to fold its sails and disappear. Long trailers of seaweed floating idly almost seemed to be endowed with a sinuous life and movement.

No bird in the air, no fish in the sea! Nothing to break the awful silence! A wreck might float and drift, here or there, upon these aimless waters for years together and never be found.

But Chance, the fickle, ruled that two vessels should break the monotony of sea and sky on this particular afternoon. One, a mighty structure, with tall tapering masts, perfect in itself, an ideal merchantman. The other, small, of exquisite yacht-like form, and with every outward sign of a great speed obtainable.

There was obviously something amiss with the larger vessel. Instead of white sails aloft on every spar, bare poles and slack ropes stood

nakedly against the blue ether. In a region of calms and light winds the merchantman had only her topsails set.

In contrast the other carried every foot of canvas. Carried it literally; for the white cloth hung mostly idle, only at times flapping softly to a breath of air that was not felt on deck. Even this was sufficient to move the little vessel through the water, which rippled past her copper-sheathed bows in long unctuous streamers. With her tremendous spread of canvas the merchantman might perhaps have made a little weigh, but under heavy topsails she lay like a log. Since dawn the smaller vessel had been steadily, though very slowly, decreasing the distance between them, and now there were signs of activity on her deck, as though a boat were about to be lowered. Across the silent waters trilled the call of a boatswain's whistle, but this confirmation would have been unnecessary to the veriest tyro in nautical matters. The vessel was plainly a man-of-war. As a matter of fact, she was one of the quick-sailing schooners built and designed by the British Government for the suppression of slave-trade on the West Coast of Africa.

Every knob of brass gleamed in the sun, every inch of deck was holystoned as white as milk. Aloft no rope was frayed, no seizing adrift. It was easy to see that this trim vessel carried a large crew under strict discipline; and in that

monotonous life the very discipline must itself have been a relief.

And now the melodious song of sailors hauling together, floated through the glittering air to the great vessel of the dead. No answering cry was heard—no expectant faces peered over the black bulwarks. The signal flags, "Do you want help?" hung unnoticed, unanswered, from the mast of the little vessel. The scene was suggestive of that fable telling of a mouse proffering aid to a lion. The huge still merchantman could have taken the slave-catcher upon its broad decks.

Presently a boat left the smaller vessel and skimmed over the water, impelled by sharp regular strokes. The sound of the oars alone broke the silence of nature.

In the stern of the boat sat a square-shouldered little man, whose brown face and glistening chestnut beard, close-cropped to a point, were pleasantly suggestive of cleanly English refinement, combined with a readiness of resource and a cheery equanimity which are learnt more readily on British decks than elsewhere. His pleasant eyes were scarcely hazel, and yet could not be described as gray, because the two colours were mixed.

As the boat approached the great merchantman, this officer formed his two hands into a circle and raised his practised voice.

"Ahoy—there!"

There was no reply, and a moment or two later the small boat swung in beneath the high bulwarks. There was a rope hanging almost to the water, and after testing its powers, with a quick jerk the young fellow scrambled up the ship's side like a monkey. Three of the boat's crew prepared to follow him.

He sat for a moment balanced on the blistered rail, and then leaped lightly down on to the deck. This was of a light green, for moss had grown there in wet weather only to be parched by a subsequent sun. Between the planks the pitch had oozed up and glistened like jet, in some places the seasoned wood had warped.

He stood for a moment alone amidst the tangled ropes, and there were beads of perspiration on his brown forehead. It is no pleasant duty to board a derelict ship, for somewhere or other there will probably be an unpleasant sight, such as is remembered through the remainder of the beholder's life.

There was something crude and hard in the entire picture—a cynical contrast, such as a Frenchman loves to put upon his canvas. In the merciless, almost shadowless, light of a midday sun every detail stood out in hard outline. The perfect ship, with its forlorn, bedraggled deck; the clean spars towering up into the heavens, with their loose cordage, their clumsily-furled sails; and upon the moss-grown deck this square-shouldered little officer—trim, seaman-

like, prompt amidst the universal slackness—the sun gleaming on his white cap and gilt buttons.

While he stood for a moment hesitating, he heard a strange, unknown sound. It was more like the rattle in a choking man's throat than anything else that he could think of. He turned quickly, and stood gazing upon the saddest sight he had yet seen in all his life. Over the tangled ropes the gaunt figure of a white dog was creeping toward him. This poor dumb brute was most piteous and heartrending; for the very dumbness of its tongue endowed its bloodshot staring eyes with a heaven-born eloquence.

As it approached there came from its throat a repetition of the sickening crackle. The young officer stooped over it with kindly word and caress. Then, and then only, did he realize that the black and shrivelled object hanging from its open lips was naught else but the poor brute's tongue. This was more like a piece of dried-up leather than living flesh.

"Water!" said the officer quickly to the man climbing over the rail behind him.

Some moments elapsed before the small beaker was handed up from the boat, and during these the officer moistened his finger at his own lips, touching the dog's tongue tenderly and skilfully.

"Look after the poor brute," he said to the man, who at length brought the water. "Don't give him too much at first."

A slight feeling of relief had come over them

all. For some reason, they concluded, the vessel had been abandoned, and in the hurry of departure the dog had been left behind.

With a lighter step he walked aft, and climbed the brass-bound companion-ladder leading to the raised poop, while two of the boat's crew followed upon his heels.

Upon the upper deck he stopped suddenly, and the colour left his lips. His face was so sunburnt that no other change was possible. Thus the three men stood in silence. There, at the wheel, upon an ordinary kitchen-chair, sat a man. His two hands clutched the brass-bound spokes; his head lay prone upon his arms. A large Panama hat completely hid his features, and the wide graceful brim touched his bent shoulders.

As the stately vessel slowly rocked upon the glassy sweep of rolling wave—the echo of some far-off storm in other waters—the great wheel jerked from side to side, swaying the man's body with it. From one muscular arm the shirt-sleeve had fallen back, displaying sinews like cords beneath the skin. Here was Death steering a dead ship through lifeless waters.

And yet in the dramatic picture there was a strange sense of purpose. The man was lashed to the chair. If life had left him, this lonely mariner had at least fought a good fight. Beneath the old Panama hat an unusual brain had at one time throbbed and planned and conceived



a purpose. This was visible in the very simplicity of his environments, for he was at least comfortable. Some biscuits lay upon the grating beside him—there was bunting on the seat and back of the chair—while the rope loosely knotted round his person seemed to indicate that sleep, and perhaps death, had been provided for and foreseen.

Gently and with excusable hesitation the English naval officer raised the brim of the large hat and displayed the face of a living man. There could be no doubt about it. The strong British face bore the signs of perfect health—the brown hair and closely-cropped beard were glossy with life.

"He's asleep!" whispered one of the sailors—a young man who had not known discipline long.

This statement, if informal, was at least correct; for the steersman of the great vessel was peacefully slumbering, alone on an abandoned ocean, beneath the blaze of an equatorial sun.

"Hulloa, my man! Wake up!" called out the young officer, clapping the sleeper on the back.

The effect was instantaneous. The sleeper opened his eyes and rose to his feet simultaneously, releasing himself from the rope which was hitched over the back of his chair. Despite ragged shirt and trousers, despite the old Panama hat with its limp brim, despite bare feet and tarry hands, there was something about this sailor

which placed him on a par—not with the able-seamen standing open-mouthed before him—but with the officer.

This sailor's action was perfectly spontaneous and natural as he faced the officer. It was an unconscious assertion of social equality.

"An English officer!" he exclaimed, holding out his hand. "I am glad."

The small man nodded his head without speaking, but he grasped the brown hand somewhat ceremoniously. The form of greeting was also extended to the two seamen by the ragged sailor.

"Are you in command of this vessel?" inquired Lieutenant Grace, looking round critically.

"I am—at present. I shipped as second mate, but have now the honour of being captain . . . crew . . . and . . . bottle-washer."

The men moved away looking about them curiously. The younger made for the deck-house, seeking the companion-way below.

"Halloa!" exclaimed the solitary mariner, "where are your men going to? Hold hard there, you fellows! Let me go down first."

The stoutly-built little officer held up a warning hand to his men, which had the effect of stopping abruptly their investigations. Then he turned and looked keenly into his companion's face. The glance was returned with the calm speculation of a man who had not yet found his moral match.

"Yellow fever?" interrogated Grace.

"Yellow fever," answered the other, with a short nod.

"I ain't afeerd of Yellow Jack!" said one of the seamen who had approached.

"That I can quite well believe, but it is useless to run an unnecessary risk. I will go first."

Suiting the action to the word, he led the way, and the young officer followed closely. The latter was vaguely conscious of a certain strain in this man's manner, as if his nerves were at an undue tension. His eyes were those of a person overwrought in mind or body, and Lieutenant Grace watched him very keenly.

At the head of the companion-ladder the sailor stopped.

"What is to-day?" he inquired, abruptly.

"Thursday."

"Ah!"

They were standing close together, and the short man looked up uneasily into his companion's face.

"Why do you inquire?" he said, gently.

"It was Tuesday when I lashed myself to that chair. I must have been sleeping forty-eight hours."

"And you have had no food since then?"

"I don't know. I really cannot tell you. I remember taking the wheel at midday on Tuesday; since then I don't exactly know what I have done."

The little officer had a peculiar way of looking

at persons who were addressing him. It gave one the impression that he was searching for a fuller meaning in the eyes than that vouchsafed by the tongue alone.

He made no reply, but stepping closer to his companion he placed his arm around him.

"You are a little overdone," he said. "I imagine you have been too long without food. Just sit down on these steps and I will get you something."

The other man smiled in a peculiar way and put the proffered arm aside in such a manner as to remove any suspicion of ridicule at the idea of aid coming from such a quarter.

"Oh no," he answered, "I am all right. It is just a little giddiness—the effect of this hot sun, no doubt. There is some brandy down below. I am a great believer in brandy."

He had descended the brass-bound steps, and as he spoke the last words he led the way into the saloon. A sail had been cast over the open skylight, so that the full glare of day failed to penetrate into the roomy cabin. Upon the oil-cloth-covered table lay a rolled sheet of brown paper in the rough form of a torch, and beside it a box of matches.

"I burn brown paper," said the sailor, quietly, as he struck a light and ignited the paper—"it is the only disinfectant I have left."

"By God—you need it!" exclaimed the officer in his handkerchief.

In the meantime the other had advanced farther into the cabin. Upon the floor, beyond the table, with their heads resting upon the hatch of the lazarette, lay two men whose forms were distinguishable beneath the dusky sheets cast over them.

"Those are the last of nineteen," said the ragged man, waving aside the acrid smoke. "I have buried seventeen myself—and nursed nineteen. That is the steward, this the first mate. They quarrelled when they were . . . alive. It seems to be made up now . . . eh? I did my best, but the more I got to know of yellow fever the greater was my respect for it. I nursed them to the best of my knowledge, and then I . . . played par on."

He pointed to an open Bible lying on the floor, and a ghastly grin flickered across his face.

The little officer was watching him with that peculiar and continuous scrutiny which has already been noticed. He barely glanced at the Bible or at the still forms beneath the unwashed sheet. All his attention was concentrated upon the survivor.

"And now," he said, deliberately, "if you will kindly go on board the *Foam*, I shall take charge of this ship."

"Eh?"

They stood looking at each other. It is rather a difficult task for a small man to look up into a face that is considerably above him, with a con-

tinued dignity, but this square-shouldered representative of British Majesty accomplished it with undoubted success.

"I take command of the ship," he said, soothingly; "you are only fit for the sick-list."

Across the long and sunken face there gleamed again an unpleasant smile—a mere contraction of the features, for the eyes remained terribly solemn. Then he looked round the cabin in a dreamy way and moved toward the base of the mizzen-mast.

"I have navigated her almost single-handed for a fortnight," he said; "I am . . . glad you came."

Then the officer led him away from the cabin.

## CHAPTER II

### AGAINST ORDERS

THIS is no seafaring record. The good ship *Martial* has been introduced here because her deck was the meeting-place of two men, whose lives having hitherto been cast in very different places, drifted at last together upon the broad waters in precisely the same aimless, incomprehensible way that the two vessels found each other upon the breathless ocean.

From the moment that the ragged steersman opened his mournful gray eyes and looked upon the sunburnt face of Lieutenant Grace, he had felt himself insensibly drawn toward his rescuer. This feeling was not the mere sense of gratitude which was naturally awakened, but something stronger. It was almost a conviction that this chance meeting on the deck of a fever-stricken ship was something more than an incident. It was a beginning—the beginning of a new influence upon his life.

When Grace laid his sunburnt hand upon the sleeper's shoulder he had felt pleasantly conscious of a contact which had further import than mere warm flannel and living muscle. It was distinctly sympathetic in its influence, for there is

a meaning in touch. All hands are not the same within the grasp of our fingers.

As the two men emerged on deck the officer turned toward his companion.

"In another hour," he said, "that small dog would have been dead."

"Ah! you've saved him?" exclaimed the other, with a sudden change of manner—a change which the first speaker had in some degree expected. They were beginning to understand each other, these two, for sailors soon read the hearts of men; and it will be generally found that he who loves a dog is the first to discover a similar love in the heart of another.

"Yes! He will recover. I know dogs."

"He's had no water since Tuesday."

"He looked rather like it. Tell me—do you feel better?"

"Yes; thanks," replied the bigger man.

"Come, then. We will go on board my ship and report to the old man, while you get a meal—some soup I should think will be best. You will have to be careful."

He led the way aft, toward the rail where the men, having found a rope-ladder, were lowering it over the side. Before reaching them he turned.

"By the way," he said, quietly, "what is your name?"

"Tyars—Claud Tyars."

"Claud Tyars," repeated the little officer, mus-



ingly, as if searching in his mind for some recollection. "There was a Tyars in the Cambridge boat two years ago—a Trinity man."

"Yes—there was."

Lieutenant Grace looked up.

"You are the man?"

"I am the man."

With a little nod the young officer continued his way. They did not speak again until they were seated in the gig on the way toward the *Foam*.

"I had a cousin," the officer remarked then in a cheerfully conversational manner, "at Cambridge. He would be a contemporary of yours. My name is Grace."

The rescued man acknowledged this introduction with a grave nod.

"I remember him well," he replied. "A great mathematician."

"I believe he was," answered Grace. He was looking toward his ship, which was now near at hand. The crew were grouped amidships, peering over the rail, while a tall old man on the quarter-deck, stopping in his meditative promenade occasionally, watched their approach with the aid of a pair of marine glasses.

"The skipper is on the lookout for us," continued the young officer in a low tone of voice requiring no reply.

"A slaver?" inquired Tyars, following the direction of his companion's eyes.

"Yes; a slaver, and the quickest ship upon the coast."

Propelled by strong and willing arms the boat soon reached the yacht-like vessel, and in a few minutes Claud Tyars was repeating his story to her captain—a genial, white-haired, red-faced old sailor.

Lieutenant Grace was present, and certain entries were made in the log-book. The two servants of her Majesty were prompt and business-like in their questions. Tyars had taken the precaution of bringing the log-book of the *Martial*, in which the deaths of the whole crew excepting himself were faithfully recorded. The proceedings were ship-shape and business-like, but as the story progressed the old commander became more and more interested, to the detriment of his official punctilio. When at last Tyars finished his narrative with the words—

"And this afternoon Lieutenant Grace found me asleep on the wheel," the old sailor leant forward across the little cabin-table, and extended an unsteady, curved hand.

"Your hand, sir. I should like to take by the hand a man with such a record as yours. You have done a wonderful thing in navigating that ship almost single-handed as far as this."

Tyars took the proffered hand, smiling his slow, unconsciously mournful smile.

"But," he said, calmly ignoring the interrogation of the old man's glance, "you must not give

me the whole credit. There are other records as good as mine, but they are finished, and so the interest suffers. Some of the men behaved splendidly. One poor fellow actually dropped dead at the wheel, refusing to go below until it was too late. He knew it was hopeless, but he took a sort of pride in dying with his fingers round the spokes. There was only one coward on board, and I am glad to say he was not an Englishman."

"Now, what was he?" asked the old sailor, who, being of a school almost extinct to-day, upheld the Anglo-Saxon race far above all other nations.

"That is hardly a fair question," interposed the more modern first officer.

"A German," answered Tyars, shortly.

Then the young surgeon of the *Foam* appeared and took charge of his second patient; for the terrier had, by Tyars' request, been attended to first.

In the quiet days that followed, the rescued man and his dog recovered from the effects of their hardship with wonderful rapidity.

Claud Tyars regained his energy, and with the return of it came that restlessness which characterized his daily way of life. He wished to be up and doing, holding idleness as an abomination as soon as its necessity became questionable. A few men had been put on board the merchantman with instructions to keep near their own

ship under all circumstances, and in consort the vessels were creeping slowly through the placid waters toward the north.

It happened that Lieutenant Grace was soon to leave the slaver on a long leave of absence, and he was therefore selected to go on board the *Martial*, with Tyars as joint commander, and a few men (for many could not be spared), with a view to sailing for Madeira, where the crew could be strengthened.

At last the doctor announced that the rescued man was perfectly strong again, and that the fever-stricken ship was to the best of his knowledge purified and disinfected.

For the first time since her departure from South America the *Martial's* sails were all shaken out, and beneath a cloud of snowy canvas she moved away on her stately progress northward; while the little slave-catcher returned to the cursed coast which required so close a watch.

One cannot go so far as to say that the seamanship displayed on board the merchantman was good, but at all events it was bold. An older navigator would, without hesitation, have accused the young captain and his blue-coated first officer of utter recklessness. Tyars held a master's certificate, and by right of seniority succeeded to the command of the *Martial*, vice captain and first mate dead and buried. In Lieutenant Grace he found a coadjutor of sympathetic

metal. Energetic, alert, and bold, he ruled the deck with cheery despotism, and went below for rest with the comforting conviction that Grace would never shorten sail from nervousness.

The vessel was ludicrously under-manned, and yet these two commanders carried on night and day, with no thought of taking in sail for safety's sake. The division of this mighty crew of ten into watches was in itself a farce, for it resulted in a sum-total of three able seamen to handle sails sufficient to employ four or five times their number.

There was no steward, no carpenter, no sail-maker on board. But sail-maker's and carpenter's work were alike allowed abeyance, while each watch cooked for itself. At first the straight-laced blue-jackets failed to enter into the spirit of the thing, and could not quite shake off their naval habit of awaiting orders. This, however, gave way in time to a joyous sense of freedom and adventure.

The question before this little band of men was the safe conduct of a valuable ship and cargo home to England, and this they one and all came to look upon in time with that breadth of view which the circumstances required. Man-of-war trimness was out of the question—carpenter there was none, so paints could not be mixed, nor decks calked, nor woodwork repaired. There was no sail-maker, so things must perforce be allowed to go a little ragged.

After a long consultation with Grace, Tyars had called together his little crew round the wheel, and there delivered to them a short harangue. The result of this and a few words from the lieutenant was that the island of Madeira was enthusiastically shelved. There were to be no half measures on board the *Martial*. They would take the ship home, if there was no watch below for any of them.

This programme was ultimately carried out to the letter. With the aid of good fortune a safe and rapid passage was performed, though, indeed, there was not too much sleep for any on board.

And during the voyage home Lieutenant Grace had studied his companion with a slow comprehensive scrutiny, such as sailors exercise. The two commanders had not been thrown much together, by reason of their duties being separate; but it was not to this fact alone that the naval officer attributed his failure to make anything of Claud Tyars. He had found this ex-wrangler calmly installed in the humble post of second mate to a merchant sailing-ship. Moreover, there was no attempt to conceal an identity which was, to say the least of it, strange. Tyars appeared in no way conscious of an unanswered question existing in his intercourse with the naval officer, and there was no suspicion of embarrassment such as might arise from anomaly.

## CHAPTER III

### HOME

THINGS were in this state between the two young men when on one morning in June the *Martial* dropped anchor at Gravesend to await the tide. The news of her tardy arrival had been telegraphed from the coast, and the Channel pilot, on landing at Deal, had thought fit to communicate to a friend in the journalistic interest a somewhat sensational account of the wonderful voyage.

It thus happened that before the anchor was well home in its native mud a stout gentleman came alongside in a wherry and climbed on deck with some alacrity. His lips were a trifle white and unsteady as he recognized Tyars, and came toward him with a fat gloved hand outstretched.

"Mr. Tyars," he said, breathlessly; "you don't remember me, perhaps. I am George Lowell, the owner. I have ten riggers coming on board to start unbending sail at once. I have to thank you in the name of the merchants and of myself for your plucky conduct, and you too sir, as well as these men."

So the voyage was accomplished, and Grace recognized the fact that the time had arrived for

him to withdraw his eight blue-jackets. Their strange duties were at an end, and one more little tale of bravery had been added to England's great roll.

He gave the word to his men and went below to get together his few belongings. As first officer, *pro tempore*, he had navigated the ship, and for some minutes he leant over the plain deal table in his diminutive stateroom with his elbows upon the outspread chart.

Across the great spread of ocean was a dotted line, but in the marks there was a difference, for three navigators had worked out the one voyage. As his eyes followed the line, day by day, hour by hour, in vivid retrospection back to the still hot regions near the equator, the young fellow realized that the voyage had been something more than a mere incident in his life. The restless days and sleepless nights had been very pleasant in their sense of satisfactory toil; the very contrast of having too much to do instead of too little was pleasurable. But above all, there was the companionship and friendship of a man who interested him more than any he had yet come in contact with. In all these days and nights this companionship was subtly interlaced, casting its influence over all. And now as he stood in the little dimly-lighted cabin, listening vaguely to the footsteps on deck overhead, he was wondering how it was that he still knew so little of Claud Tyars; speculating still, as he had



speculated weeks before in vain, why this educated gentleman had taken up the rough life of a merchant sailor.

Looking back over the days and nights they had passed through together, he realized how little leisure there had been for mere conversation. In the working of the ship, in the attempt to enable ten men to do the work of twenty, there had been sufficient to keep them fully engaged without leaving time for personal matters. But it is in such a life as this, lived together, that men really learn to know each other, and not in the mere interchange of thought, or give and take of question and answer.

Lieutenant Grace was in his small way a student of human nature. Men who watch the sea and sky, to gather from their changes the deeper secrets of wind and weather, acquire a habit of watching lips and eyes, gathering therefrom little hints, small revelations, tiny evidences which when pieced together make that strange incongruous muddle called Man. Of the human being Claud Tyars he knew a good deal—of the gentleman, the travelled sportsman, he knew absolutely nothing. Beyond the bare fact that Trinity College had left its inefaceable mark upon him, the past history of this sailor was a blank to Grace. The character was there in all its self-reliant, independent strength, but of its foundation the little naval philosopher would fain have learnt more.

Grace, on the other hand, had spoken frankly enough of his family, his prospects and intentions, during such limited intercourse as their duties had allowed them. There had been no question of a different social status between the two men thus strangely thrown together, and Tyars had accepted his companion's recognition of equality without comment or remark. Of his former companions he spoke with kindness and some admiration, both totally devoid of patronage. Altogether he treated the question of his peculiar position with an aggravating nonchalance.

When Grace went on deck a little later, leaving his baggage to be brought up by one of the blue-jackets, this thought was still uppermost in his mind. He found Tyars and Mr. Lowell walking together on the after-deck; the former talking earnestly, while the owner of the ship listened with pained eyes. They came toward Grace together, and he told them of his intention to take his men up to London by train at once in order to report themselves at the Admiralty.

There were boats alongside—the riggers were on board, indeed they were already at work aloft, and there was no cause for further delay. He turned away with visible reluctance, and went forward to call his men together. Mr. Lowell followed and shook hands gratefully, after which he went aft to speak to the pilot, who was sitting upon the wheel-grating reading a news-

paper. Thus Grace and Tyars were left alone amidships, for the men were busy throwing their effects into the boats.

"I hope," said Tyars, "that you will not get into a row for coming straight home without calling at Madeira on the chance of picking up more men."

"I don't anticipate any difficulty," was the reply; "my uncle has the pulling of a few of the strings, you know."

Tyars nodded his head. There was nothing more to be said. The men were already clambering down the ship's side, eager to get ashore.

"Good-bye," said Grace, holding out his hand. "I—eh—I'm glad we got her home."

"Good-bye."

They shook hands, and Tyars stood still upon the deck he had trodden so long, while the little officer moved away toward the gangway. Somehow there was a sense of insufficiency on both sides. There was something left unsaid, and yet neither could think of anything to say.

Grace had not gone many yards when he stopped, hesitated, and finally returned.

"I say, Tyars," he said, hurriedly, "is this going to be the end of it all? I don't think we ought to lose sight of each other."

"No; I don't think we ought."

Still he seemed to have nothing to suggest—no common haunt to hold up as a likely meeting-place such as men bound by many social or

household ties shield themselves behind when friendship becomes exacting.

A more sensitive man than the young officer would at once have felt rebuffed, but Grace, in his genial honesty, had no such thought. Perhaps, indeed, he searched deeper into the man's silence with his steady gaze, and discovered the presence of some other motive than unsociability.

"Then," he said, "will you come up and see us in town. The gov'nor would like to make your acquaintance. Come and dine—yes, that is best, come and dine—to-morrow evening. Number one hundred and five Brook Street, Grosvenor Square. You won't forget the address?"

"Thanks; I shall be most happy. What time do you dine?"

"Well, I don't know. I have been away from home four years; but come at seven."

"Seven o'clock; number one hundred and five Brook Street. Thanks."

They had reached the gangway, and Grace now turned with a little nod of acknowledgment, and began making his way down the unsteady steps into the boat awaiting him. Tyars stood on the grating, with one hand resting on the rail of the ship, the other in his jacket-pocket.

At seven o'clock that night the *Martial* found rest at last, moored safely alongside the quay in the East India Dock. There was a little crowd of idlers upon the pier and on the gates of the tidal basin, for the fame of the ship had spread. But

more eyes were directed toward the man who had done this deed of prowess, for the human interest is, after all, paramount in things in which we busy our minds. For one who looked at the ship, there were ten of those mariners, dock-labourers, and pilots who sought Tyars.

"He ain't one of us at all," muttered a sturdy lighterman to his mate. "'E's a toff, that's wot 'e is; a gentleman, if yer please."

But gentleman or no gentleman, these toilers of the sea welcomed the plucky sailor with a hoarse cheer. The stately ship glided smoothly forward in all the deep-seated glory of her moss-grown decks, her tarnished brass, her slack ropes. There seemed to be a living spirit of calm silent pride in the tapering spars and weather-beaten hull, as if the vessel held high her head amidst her sprucer compeers. She seemed to be conscious—this mere structure of wood and iron and yielding hemp—that her name was far above mere questions of paint and holystone. Her pride lay in her deeds and not in her appearance. Her sphere was not in moorings but upon the great seas. She came like a soldier into camp, disdaining to wipe the blood from off his face.

Tyars stood near the wheel, hardly noticing the crowd upon the quay. The pilot and the dock-master had to some extent relieved him of his command, but he still had certain duties to perform, and he was still the captain of the *Mar-*

*tial*, the only man who sailed from London in her to return again.

When at last she was moored and his command had ceased, he went below and changed his clothes. When he came on deck a little later, Claud Tyars was transformed. The keen, resourceful sailor was merely a gentleman of the world. Self-possessed and somewhat cold in manner, he was the sort of man one would expect to meet on the shady side of Piccadilly, while his brown face would be accounted for by military service in a tropical climate.

The idlers in the Shipping Office at Tower Hill were treated on the following morning to a strange sight. According to formula, the brokers of the *Martial* had indicated to the shipping authorities their desire to pay off the crew of the vessel. Shortly before the hour named a number of women began to assemble. Some were dressed respectably, others were of the lowest class that London produces; but all made some attempt at mourning. One or two wore their crape weeds with that incomprehensible feminine pride in such habiliment which shows itself in all grades of society, while others were clad in black—rusty, ill-fitting, evidently borrowed. A common sorrow, a mutual interest, served as introduction among these ladies, and they talked eagerly together. Scraps of conversation floated over the black bonnets. One had lost her husband, another her son, a third only her brother.

"Ain't 'e come yet?" they asked each other at intervals. "The survivor—'im that brought 'er 'ome with his own 'ands. I wanter ask him about my man—about 'is end."

There were no signs of violent sorrow; only a sense, discernible here and there, of importance, the result of crape.

At last a hansom cab turned the corner of the Minories and pulled up noisily on the noisy stones. Claud Tyars threw open the doors and stepped out. He had come to be paid off; he was the ctew of the *Martial*.

In a moment he was surrounded by the women, every one clamouring for news of her dead sailor. The broker's clerk, an observant youth, noticed that during the half-hour that followed, Tyars never referred to his log-book, but answered each question unerringly from memory. He gave details, dates, and particulars without hesitation or doubt. It was perhaps owing to a knowledge of the commercial value of a good memory that the young clerk made note of these details. He was not observant enough to take account of the finer shades of manner, of the infinite tact with which the survivor of the crew treated the women-folk of his late comrades. He did not detect the subtle art by which some were sent away rejoicing over the dogged, dauntless courage of their husbands; he was only conscious of a feeling of admiration for this man who hitherto had hardly noticed

him. But he failed to discern that the difficult task was accomplished unconsciously. He did not realize that Claud Tyars possessed a gift which is only second to genius in worldly value—the gift of unobtrusively ruling his fellow-men.

As Tyars drove away from the Shipping Office, he saw the street newsvendors displaying their posters with the words: "A wonderful story of the sea," printed in sensational type.

"Hang it," he muttered with a vexed laugh, "I never counted on a notoriety of this sort."

Presently he bought an evening paper and read of the exploits of "Captain" Tyars with a singular lack of pride.

When Mr. Lowell, the owner of the *Martial*, offered him the command of the ship the same afternoon in Leadenhall Street, he gravely and politely declined it. With the shipowner, as with Lieutenant Grace, Tyars appeared quite blind to the necessity of an explanation, and none was asked.

So ended the incident of the *Martial*. Its direct bearing upon the life of Claud Tyars would seem to terminate at the same moment; but indirectly the experience thus acquired influenced his career, formed to some extent his character, and led (as all things great and small lead us) to the end.



## CHAPTER IV

### IN BROOK STREET

In the meantime Lieutenant Grace had received at the hands of his father and sister a warm welcome.

Without announcement of any description he made his way from the Admiralty to Brook Street, and knocked at his father's door. He found the old gentleman and Miss Helen Grace engaged in the consumption of afternoon tea.

"Oswin!" exclaimed the old admiral in a voice laden with muffin and emotion. "I thought you were on the African coast."

Helen Grace was a young lady not much given to exclamatory expression of feeling. She rose from the low chair she habitually occupied near the small table built upon two stories—tea above and work below—and kissed her brother.

Then she turned his face toward the light by the collar of his coat.

"Have you been invalided home?" she asked.

"No."

"But the *Foam* is out there still," put in the admiral, eager to show his intimate knowledge of official matters.

"Yes. I came home in a derelict. A fine, big

ship without a crew. All dead of yellow fever, except one. I am glad that he was picked out by Providence to survive."

"Why?" inquired Helen.

"Because I like him."

"What was he—A. B. or officer?" asked the admiral, who having despatched the muffin was now less emotional.

"Second mate, holding a captain's certificate. I have asked him to dinner to-morrow night."

"Oh!" murmured Helen, doubtfully.

"With his dog—the other survivor."

"Ah!" said Helen, in a more interested tone.

"Do they know how to behave themselves?"

"I think so—both of them," was the reply.

"It seems to me," observed the admiral, with an easy chuckle, which seemed in some way connected with the depths of his chest, "that you did not devote much time at all to the question of toilet."

"No," replied Grace, frankly. "We were a shady crew. You see there were only ten of us to navigate a thousand-ton ship full-rigged. We had no time for personal adornment. You will see all about it in the evening paper; I brought one with me on purpose. May I have some tea, Helen? It is months since I have seen such an article as bread-and-butter."

"And this man," she inquired when the paragraph had been duly digested—"the man you have asked to dinner—what is he like?"

The naval officer helped himself to a limp slice of bread-and-butter with great thoughtfulness.

"That it just the difficulty," he replied. "I cannot tell you what he is like—because I don't know. I do not understand him—that is the long and short of it. He is above me."

"I suppose," suggested the admiral, who held the keener study of human nature in some contempt, "that he is merely a rough sailor-man—a merchant captain."

The lieutenant shook his smooth head.

"No," he answered, "he is hardly that. I want you," he continued after a pause, turning to his sister, "to judge for yourself, so will not tell you what I think about him."

"Then he is interesting?"

"Yes, I think you will find him interesting."

Helen was already seeking in her mind how things could be made easy and comfortable for the unpolished hero whom her brother had so unceremoniously introduced into the house.

"Agnes Winter was coming to-morrow to dine, but she can be put off," she observed, carelessly.

"Agnes Winter—why should she be put off? Let her come by all means."

The little man's manner was perhaps too indifferent to be either natural or polite. He was either unconsciously rude or exaggerating an indifference he did not feel. Helen, however,

continued her remarks without appearing to notice anything.

"Would you not," she inquired, while replacing in its vase a flower that had become displaced, "rather have him quite alone—when we are by ourselves, I mean?"

"Oh no. He is all right. If he is good enough for you, he is good enough for Agnes Winter."

"Has he got a suit of dress-clothes?" asked the admiral, with a blunt laugh.

Lieutenant Grace let his hand fall heavily upon his thigh with a gesture of mock regret.

"I quite forgot to ask him," he exclaimed, dramatically.

"There is some mystery attached to this person," laughed Helen. Her laughter was a little prolonged in order that her father (whose duller sense of humour sometimes failed to follow his son's fancy) might comprehend that this was a joke.

"Well," said the old gentleman, thrusting his hands deeply into his pockets, "I like a man to come to my table in a claw-hammer coat."

Helen's gentle eyes rested for a moment on her brother's face. With an almost imperceptible movement of lid and eyebrow, hardly amounting to the license of a wink, he reassured her.

"What time is dinner? I told him to come at seven o'clock," said he, holding out his cup for more tea.

"That is right," answered Helen.

"You would have done better," said the admiral, still unpacified, "to have given the man a dinner at your club."

"Oh," replied his son, serenely, "I wanted you and Helen to make his acquaintance; besides I could not have invited Muggins to the club."

"Muggins?" growled the old gentleman interrogatively.

"The dog."

"Ah. Is he a presentable sort of fellow then, that you want your sister to meet him?"

"The dog?" inquired Grace, with much innocence.

"No," laughed his father, despite himself; "the man—Tyre, or Sidon, or whatever his name is."

"Tyars. Yes; I think so. Tyars is distinctly presentable . . . or else I would not have suggested his coming."

The two men now started a conversation upon very nautical matters, employing such technical terms and waxing so interested that Helen sought a chair near the window and settled down to listen with respectful silence. This went on until a functionary blessed with a beaming countenance came to announce that the admiral's hot water had gone upstairs. It was always a pleasure to be waited on by Salter, although as a butler *pur et simple* he was a questionable success. Although he wore a black coat and irreproachable linen, carried the cellar-key, and per-

formed most scrupulously his household duties, the man was a sailor from the top of his thickly-covered gray head to the soles of his great silent splay feet, to which shoes were an evident trial.

When the admiral had left the room to attend to his formal toilet, Oswin crossed the floor and stood beside his sister, his hands stuffed deeply into his pockets, his scrutinizing glance cast downward.

"And," he observed, "and—here we are again!"

She laid aside her work.

"Yes," said she, affectionately. "Here we are again. I have not quite realized it yet."

"But I could not let you know, my dearly beloved."

"No, I suppose not. As it is, the faithful Salter will be happy because it will be in his hands. I expect he has been in your room ever since you arrived."

"Poor old Salter!" exclaimed the young fellow, in a tone which betokened that he was not thinking very much of what he was saying. "When he opened the door he swore and remarked affably that it was Oswin, without any narrow-minded prefix or title. Then he offered me his hand."

There was about Grace's manner the slightest suspicion of a desire to fill up time. He was talking with the view of gaining time to think of some other subject. He now broke off suddenly

and walked away down the whole length of the large room, looking at chairs, tables, and ornaments critically.

"It is very nice," he observed, "to be home again."

Helen had resumed her work, and without looking up she answered—

"It is very nice to have you back."

For some moments there was a silence in the room, while the young officer examined critically a bowl of flowers standing upon the mantelpiece. Then he turned and spoke with a conversational evenness.

"How is Agnes Winter?" he asked.

"She is very well. Did those flowers remind you of her?"

"Ye—es," he replied, slowly; "I wonder why."

"Because she arranged them, I suppose," suggested the girl, looking up suddenly as if struck at the possibility of her idea being of some weight.

"Perhaps so. She is not engaged yet?"

Helen threaded a needle with some care and stooped over her work.

"No; she is just the same as ever. Always busy, always happy, always a favourite. But—one never hears the slightest rumour of an engagement, or even a flirtation."

"While," added Grace, airily, "her dear friend flirts here and flirts there, but keeps clear of the serious part of it all with equal skill."

"Which friend?" inquired Helen, innocently.

"Yourself!"

"Oh! I have my duties. Papa could not get on without me. Marriage and love and all that, you know, have much more to do with convenience than is generally supposed."

"Indeed?"

She ignored his pleasantry.

"I often wonder," she said, thoughtfully, "why somebody or other does not fall in love with Agnes Winter."

After a pause he put forward a suggestion.

"Because she will not let him, perhaps."

"That may be so, but surely a sensible man does not wait to be allowed."

"The question," he answered, with mock gravity, "is rather beyond me. It is hard to say what a sensible man would do, because in such matters no rule can be laid down defining where sense begins and foolishness ends. The man who got Agnes Winter would be sensible, however he did it."

Presently the girl went to dress for dinner, leaving her brother standing at the window whistling softly beneath his breath.



## CHAPTER V

### A REUNION

IF there had been any doubts entertained or discussed as to the presentability of Claud Tyars in polite circles, these were destined to an instant removal when that individual entered the drawing-room of No. 105 Brook Street.

His manners were those of a travelled and experienced English gentleman. That is to say, he was polite without eagerness, pleasant without gush, semi-interested, semi-indifferent.

The necessary introductions were made, and there was no bungling over this difficult social duty.

"I think," said Helen at once, "that we have met before."

She was looking up at Tyars, who being very tall stood a head higher than any one in the room, and in her eyes there was no speculation, no searching into the recesses of her memory. The remark was without interrogative hesitation. It was the assertion of a fact well known to her, and yet her colour changed.

"Yes," answered Tyars; "I had the pleasure of dancing with you at the Commemoration three years ago."

"But you are not an Oxford man!" put in Lieutenant Grace.

"No."

"What a good memory you have, Mr. Tyars!" observed Miss Agnes Winter in a smooth soft voice. "Perhaps you can help mine. Have we met before? I know your face."

He turned to her with a smile in which there was no light of dawning recollection.

"Hardly," he replied. "But you were sitting in the middle of the last row of the stalls at a performance of *Hamlet* last autumn."

"Now I remember," interrupted Miss Winter, with her pleasant laugh; "of course. Please don't tell me any more. My stall was number—number two hundred and sixty . . .?"

"Four," suggested Tyars, in such a manner that it was in reality no suggestion at all.

"Yes; two hundred and sixty-four. There was an empty seat on my right hand."

"And an old gentleman occupied that on your left."

"My father," she explained simply, but in the tone of her pleasant voice there was something which made Tyars look gravely at her with a very slight bow as if in apology. Oswin Grace glanced at his sister with raised eyebrows, and she nodded almost imperceptibly. He had not heard of old Mr. Winter's death.

In less skilled hands this incident might have led to an awkward silence, but Agnes Winter

had not spent ten years of her life in a whirl of society for nothing. She knew that one's own feelings are of a strictly individual value.

"You," she continued, "took the vacant seat."

There was something very like a question in her glance. Oswin Grace did not look pleased, and his eyes turned from one face to the other searchingly. Then she seemed suddenly to have received an answer to her query, for she turned to Helen and launched into narration gaily.

"I will tell you," she said, "why these details are engraven so indelibly upon such a poor substance as my memory. It was rather a grand night; royalty was present, and the theatre was almost full. In front of me were two men who did not appear to be taking an absorbing interest in the play, for one was drawing something which I took to be a map upon his programme . . ."

"It *was* a map," confessed Tyars, lightly.

"While he whispered earnestly at intervals to his companion, I came to the conclusion that he was trying to persuade him to go and look for Livingstone, which suggestion was not well received. At last he turned round. I thought he was admiring, or at least noticing, the new diamond star in my hair, but subsequent events proved that he was looking over my head. I was disappointed," she added aside to Tyars.

"I both noticed and admired," he exclaimed in

self-defence. "There were two diamond stars, one much larger than the other."

"Well," continued Miss Winter, in her gentle rippling style, "at the first interval this irreproachable young man left his seat, came round, turned back the chair next to me, and *shook . . . hands* with a man in the *pit*!"

The pith of the story lay in its narration, which was perfect. The lady knew her audience as an able actor knows his house. By some subtle trick of voice the incident was made to redound to Tyars' credit, while its tone was distinctly against him. The easy, cheery, honest humour of voice and expression was irresistible. Even the admiral laughed—as much as he ever laughed at a joke not related by himself.

"He was," explained Tyars in his unsatisfactory way, "a friend of mine."

At this moment the door was opened by Salter, who came forward as if he were going to snatch at his forelock and report that he had come on board; but he evidently recollected himself in time, and announced that dinner was ready.

As they were moving toward the door, Oswin suddenly stopped.

"Where is Muggins?" he asked.

"On the mat," replied Tyars. "He was rather shy, and preferred waiting for a special invitation. He is not quite at home on carpets yet."

"I have heard about Muggins," said Helen to

Tyars as they went downstairs together, "and am anxious to make his acquaintance."

So Muggins was introduced to his new friends, standing gravely on the dining-room hearth-rug with his sturdy legs set well apart, his stump of a tail jerking nervously at times, and his pink-rimmed eyes upraised appealingly to his master's face. He was endeavouring to the best of his ability to understand who all these well-dressed people were, and why he was forced into such sudden social prominence. Moreover, he was desirous of acquitting himself well; and there was a smell of ox-tail soup that was somewhat distracting to a seafarer.

The dinner passed off very pleasantly, and many subjects were discussed with greater or less edification. Miss Winter seemed to take the lead, in virtue of her seniority over the young hostess, touching upon many things with her light and airy precision, her gay philosophy, her gentle irony. Helen was graver in her conversation, lacking the dexterity of Miss Winter in dealing with every subject as if at one time she had studied it and thought upon it. Oswin was lightest in his touch of them all, for he treated most things in life from a farcical point of view—at least in conversation. And upon every subject Claud Tyars seemed to know something. In the recesses of his singular memory there seemed to be an inexhaustible store of experience, reading, hearsay, and knowledge. Great facts were

mixed up and stored side by side with trivial details. He was as intimate with the words of *Hamlet* as he was posted up in the details of Miss Winter's toilet on the occasion of that play being acted in London a year before.

When the two ladies left the dining-room, they carried with them the impression that Claud Tyars was unlike any man they had ever met. It was difficult to define in the possession of what qualities this difference lay, but both alike were vaguely conscious of that fascination which is exercised by utter naturalness. It was in his complete unconsciousness of any difference that Claud Tyars was different from other men. He was in perfect ignorance of his own individuality. In his heart he rather prided himself upon being eminently commonplace. The impression he unconsciously conveyed was that instead of being purposeless his life and being were absorbed by one unique interest to the exclusion of all else. What this interest might be the two girls could not tell, and over this question each speculated in her own way as they mounted the softly-carpeted stairs in silence.

The drawing-room was now lighted by a large pink-shaded lamp which cast its mellow glow downward upon a table artistically disorderly in its comfortable chaos of literature and woman's work. Despite her thirty years Agnes Winter drew forward a low chair, and seated herself beside the table in the full glow of the lamp; tak-

ing up an illustrated magazine, and turning the pages idly. Helen went toward the piano, which was always open in silent invitation. She did not seek any music, but sat down and played snatches of anything that came into her head, while her foot pressed the soft pedal continuously. This habit of making muffled music was the outcome of her father's slumberous ways after dinner.

"Helen!"

The girl did not answer at once, but continued her rambling melody, while Miss Winter turned to the magazine again.

"Yes," she said at length, making the music-stool revolve.

"Why," asked Agnes Winter without looking up, "did you not tell me that you had met Mr. Tyars before?"

The girl appeared to have expected the question; her reply was quite ready, and almost forestalled the words.

"Why should I have thought of connecting the Mr. Tyars of Trinity College, Cambridge, with the second mate Tyars of the merchantman *Martial*?"

"No . . . of course it was hardly likely. but you recognized him at once, I suppose?"

"Yes—I think so."

"I do not remember," continued Miss Winter, casually, "that you ever mentioned having met him."

"No?"

Helen turned again upon the revolving stool, and sought the soft pedal.

"No!" answered Miss Winter, leaning suddenly back, and dropping her two hands into her lap. Her dark, intelligent eyes were raised thoughtfully toward the young girl, who was now playing a minuet with great precision.

"No; I think not."

Although Helen continued playing for some time Miss Winter did not resume her book. She sat in the comfortable chair quite motionless, apparently buried in thought.

It was Helen who at length broke the silence, rising and coming into the rosy circle of lamp-light.

"Agnes," she said, "I wonder why that man has . . . taken to the sea?"

The elder lady allowed herself the luxury of some moments' thought.

"I don't know," she answered at length, altering her posture smoothly; "*and*," she added lightly, "I don't care."

They remained thus looking at each other. There was a slight smile upon Miss Winter's face, her red lips were parted pleasantly. After all, she did right in drawing her chair close to the lamp—she had nothing to fear from its searching light. Her complexion was of that clean pink and white which never alters, never burns in the summer or grows rough in winter; and her fea-



tures were round and pleasantly full. She was the sort of woman to look well with gray hair fifteen years later than the period at which Tyars met her. As a girl she probably gave promise of future stoutness, as a woman she had failed to keep the promise, and remained tolerably slim. The small white hands and arms, dropped idly in her lap, had a clever dexterous air with them. The majority of her friends looked upon Agnes Winter as a woman who was not likely to make an egregious error in life.

The slight smile with which she encountered her companion's grave glance might have aggravated persons to whom her character was superficially known. Its tenor was almost ironical. Helen, however, continued gazing gravely down at the pleasant whole without heeding the irony of the eyes.

"Is he not peculiar?" she said at length, with a little backward jerk of the head.

"Very! Most peculiar, I consider him. Nevertheless I like him."

"He is . . . odd," said Helen, moving away to clear a small table for the coffee-tray.

"Yes," murmured Miss Winter. "And I think he has an object . . . He would like us to think that he has not—but I think he has."

"What sort of an object?"

"An object in life, my dear."

Helen came forward carrying a small Chinese table.

"I suppose we all have that."

"Not all of us, Helen," corrected Miss Winter, with a slight suspicion of bitterness.

"And what do you suppose Mr. Tyars' object in life to be?"

Miss Winter shrugged her shoulders.

"I have not the slightest conception," she replied; "no doubt we shall find out in time. Men cannot conceal an honest purpose for very long. It leaks out."

Helen took up her work, and presently found a comfortable chair which she brought forward beside the little table. But she did not seem disposed to ply her needle very steadily. After a few stitches her fingers became idle. She raised her head, and although her eyes were apparently fixed upon the upper part of the wall, she did not give one the impression of seeing anything. Her gaze had the appearance of penetrating the wall, piercing through the thick vapours of earth, and soaring away into ethereal depths unknown. At the same time she seemed to be listening. Her face was like that of a child told by her nurse to listen for the beat of an angel's wing.

Miss Winter glanced up, and immediately returned to the perusal of her magazine. She knew that expression of Helen's face, and had once laughingly told her that when she thought deeply she seemed to expect the ideas to come flying down from heaven, for she looked and listened for them as if they were birds.

At length the girl stirred and gave forth a little short, practical sigh.

"Well," inquired Miss Winter, pleasantly, "what is the result of that?"

"Of what?"

"Of that meditation."

Helen put in a few stitches before replying frankly —

"I wish I knew his object."

"I do not suppose," said the elder woman in a consolatory tone, "that it will prove very interesting. It is probably a very commonplace object—the most commonplace of all perhaps, money. After the age of thirty few of us care for anything else, and I should set him down at thirty-two."

Helen shook her head in gentle negation, but did not make any further protest. She turned to her work again, and sewed for a considerable time in silence. Once she raised her head as if about to speak, but the words came not forth. A second time she raised her head and spoke slowly in such a way that no interruption was permissible.

"I am interested," she said, "in the matter, because I have a sort of feeling that whatever Mr. Tyars' object in life may be, Oswin will be drawn into it sooner or later. I don't know from whence I got the idea, but that is my distinct impression. Did you notice the way in which he looked at Oswin? He seemed to be watching him, studying him, drawing him out."

"As if," suggested Miss Winter, keenly, "he were examining him for some special object."

"Yes. Then you noticed it?"

Agnes Winter nodded her head gravely.

"I almost wish," said Helen, after a short pause in which they had both recalled in silent thought the small incidents of the evening; "I almost wish, Agnes, that he had not come."

This was greeted with a short laugh—the fearless laugh of a woman who knows her will to be stronger than the average will of man.

"Why?"

"Because . . . because of his object. This purposeless man came here to-night not because he happened to have nothing better to do, not because he was too indifferent to refuse Oswin's invitation, but for some specific reason."

"Now," observed Miss Winter, in a very matter-of-fact voice, "you are exaggerating matters. There is no greater mistake to be made than to assign motives indiscriminately. Most people have no motives at all, some of us have them occasionally, but nobody has a chronic purpose."

"Mr. Tyars has a chronic purpose, that is why he is different from other people," persisted Helen.

There was a pleasant confidence about Miss Winter. Perhaps it was merely a conversational attribute of no great influential power, but it frequently obtained for her the credit of know-

ing more about her subject than was really the case.

"No," she said calmly; "he is different from other people because his appearance is singular. His height is decidedly above the average, and there is a peculiar solid force about him which may mean great strength of will, or it may be only a matter of physical bulk. He wears a beard, and beards are not the fashion just now, even in the navy. That, my dear, is why Mr. Tyars is different from other people."

She stopped and seemed to await a reply, which, however, was not forthcoming. Then suddenly she descended to a feminine detail.

"I like his beard," she added, "it is trim and manly."

This observation Helen was pleased to ignore. She was still meditating over the expression of Tyars' face while he happened to be looking at her brother Oswin. She could not explain it to herself, but there was something disquieting in the attention accorded by this man to his new friend. It was not only, as she had explained to Miss Winter, that Tyars was watching Oswin Grace, but there was in the man's steady eyes a gleam of distinct purpose. She had seen this on more than one occasion, had caught it in transit, and in the momentary flash of misapprehension had been quite unable to define its meaning.

"I should think," she said at last, "that he is a man of very strong will."

Miss Winter smiled meditatively.

"It is difficult," she answered, "to tell on such a short acquaintance. Men are like bottles of wine. One should not judge them from the appearance of the sawdust they carry."

"Still, I think that on further acquaintance one would find a strong will beneath Mr. Tyars' pleasant suavity."

"Perhaps so."

"I should be rather afraid to count upon the contrary," said Helen.

Again Miss Winter smiled in a pleasant, indifferent way, which in some degree made the conversation trivial in its bearing.

"Oh no," she murmured, reassuringly; "I think I should not be afraid to match myself against Mr. Ty—— . . ."

At this moment the door opened and Tyars came in, followed by the admiral. They had come up the thickly-carpeted stairs without speaking.

## CHAPTER VI

### DOUBTS

MISS WINTER looked up with a smile and met Tyars' smiling eyes.

There was no doubt whatever that he had heard. The matter did not present itself to her mind in the light of a question. She knew, and over this certainty she was thinking with all the rapidity of her sex and kind. Woman of the world as she was, she acted promptly: if a placid inactivity can be prompt and may be so denominated. It is dangerous to lay down a comprehensive rule for anything or any crisis in life; but it seems that calmness is a great factor in human progress. One would conclude in a small way, from small experience, that the people who do good in the world and get on therein are those who keep calm "when breezes blow," and do *almost* nothing. Almost—not quite nothing! It is such as these who act rightly when the moment comes. They are the reserve of the great human army, and from a military point of view it is well to consider in whose hands rests the command of the reserve. He should be the best man upon the field.

"We have," said Tyars, pleasantly, addressing

both ladies at once, "been talking most unmitigated 'shop.'"

"It seems to me," replied Miss Winter, "that gentlemen always do. The seed that runs to waste in gossip with us, sprouts into sturdy 'shop' with men."

The admiral, who was at times a little testy after a good dinner, lifted his white head and mentally measured this youth who dared to place his own knowledge of maritime matters upon a level with that of an old sea-dog like himself—who dared, moreover, to class the two under the opprobrious term of "shop."

"Then," he said in a throaty voice as he seated himself, "I suppose you call yourself quite a sailor despite your Cambridge honours."

"Not in your presence."

Helen looked up sharply over her coffee-tray. It was impossible to tell whether there were irony or not in the smile with which Tyars looked down at his host. The old man took the remark as a compliment, in which spirit it had to all appearances been made.

"The sea," he said in a pleasanter tone, "is like a woman. Young men think they understand it, old men know they don't!"

"And," put in Miss Winter between sips of coffee, "its mystery lies in its simplicity." . . . She turned toward Tyars, who was standing over her with a plate of biscuits. As she took one she looked up at him for a moment. "In



both cases," she said, "the superficial is honoured by too small an attention. Men look too much beneath the surface for events that come from outside."

"I have been told," he answered, "that a good sailor learns to take things as they come without seeking to learn from whence they do so."

"Do you take sugar?" inquired Helen, in her downright way.

"Or," added Miss Winter, without looking up, "will you take your coffee as it comes?"

Tyars had crossed the room toward Helen. He glanced back over his shoulder after having received his cup.

"Seeing," he said to Miss Winter, "from whence it comes, I think I will."

She laughed, and answered nothing. Perhaps she was thinking of the words he had probably overheard on entering the room. There was a pause and a silence such as succeeds the whistle and the ring of steel when two fencers lower their foils and breathe hard. At this moment Oswin Grace entered the room carrying some books, of which there had been a question at the table. At his heels came Muggins, who, however, paused upon the threshold and watched his master's face.

"Let him come in," said Helen to Tyars.

And so Muggins joined the party, and went from one to the other with a calm ignorance of the undercurrents of social intercourse. He was

pleasant and courteous, as was his invariable habit, and it is not for us to analyze his motives or to insinuate that sweet biscuits are pleasant fare after hard tack and rusty, warm water. He soon discovered that Miss Winter failed to recognize his manifold virtues, but this omission was repaired by Helen, whose silk train was offered for his comfort. With that air of philosophic surprise which is characteristic of his kind he accepted the proffered seat, and snored rather loudly during the evening.

As the time went on, passing pleasantly enough in that vague and general conversation which vanishes as soon as intimacy begins, Miss Winter noticed how very little Tyars spoke of himself. This reticence was almost a fault, and it may as well be stated at once that so far from possessing a motive was Tyars, that he was quite unaware of the peculiarity. It was a mere habit acquired from a continuous intercourse with men below him in the moral and social scale. He had dropped into a way of treating everything from an impersonal point of view, which in time is calculated to aggravate the listener. Discussions carried on in such a spirit are in reality desperately futile, because if we do not frankly take the world from a personal point of view we shall not get much instruction from it. Miss Winter went so far as to place him once or twice in such a position that his own personal opinion, or the result of individual experience,

would have been the simplest answer, but he invariably quoted from the experience of some vague and unnamed acquaintance. Admiral Grace was the only person who really succeeded in getting a piece of personal information, and this by the bluntest direct question.

"I once," said the old gentleman, "was on a committee with a west-country baronet of your name—a Sir Wilbert Tyars—is he any relation of yours?"

"Yes," Tyars answered, with just sufficient interest to prove his utter indifference. "Yes; he is my uncle."

There was a short pause; some further remark was evidently expected.

"I have not seen him for many years," he added, closing the incident.

When Miss Winter's carriage was announced at a quarter to eleven, Tyars rose and said good-night with an unemotional ease which might equally have marked the beginning of an intimacy or the consummation of a formal social debt.

When Agnes Winter came downstairs arrayed in a soft diaphanous arrangement of Indian silk he was gone, and the three young people, as they bade each other good-night in the hall, were conscious of a feeling of insufficiency. None of the three attempted to define this sensation even to themselves, but it was not mere curiosity—not that vulgar curiosity which attracts all human beings to a drawn curtain. It is worth noticing that

Claud Tyars' name was not mentioned again in the house after the front-door had closed behind him. And yet every person who had seen him that evening was thinking of him; upon them all the impress of his singular individuality had been left.

"'Ain't wot I'd call a sailor man neither," muttered Salter, thoughtfully scratching his stubbly chin with a two-shilling piece which happened to be in his hand as he returned to the pantry after closing the front-door. "And yet there's grit in him. Sort o' 'bad weather' man, I'm thinking."

Oswin's reflections as he undressed and slowly prepared for sleep were of a mixed character. He was not quite sure that the visit of his late shipmate had been an entire success. His own personal interest in the man had in no way diminished, but the light of feminine eyes cast upon their friendship had brought that difference which always comes to our male acquaintances when we introduce them to our women-folk.

Claud Tyars in flannel shirt and duck trousers on the deck of the *Martial* was in Oswin Grace's estimation the personification of all that is manly; but the same individual in evening dress, treading soft carpets instead of washed-out planks, talking in a smooth voice instead of shouting orders, was quite a different man. He admitted to himself that Tyars seemed to be as much at home in the one place as in the other. And he

failed perhaps to see that the reason of this subtle feeling of antagonism was not so deeply hidden after all. It lay in the simple fact that that side of Claud Tyars' character which can only be described as the dominant—the unconscious but arbitrary influence wielded by him—was eminently desirable on the quarter-deck, and distinctly out of place in a drawing-room, presided over by a young lady.

Grace knew that his father had been prejudiced against Tyars because he was a merchant sailor and a second mate; qualifications which are hardly recommendations in a drawing-room. He suspected that Helen was not entirely free from this same preconceived opinion, and probably Agnes Winter had been made a partner in the feeling. Now prejudice is a hard foe to meet, because the human mind, as we all know, is skilful at twisting facts and fancies into any shape but the right one. A mistaken prejudice has before now lasted the lifetime of its victim—we see the work of prejudice around us every day. Oswin Grace was a sufficiently close observer of human nature to know that Tyars had come into his father's house heavily handicapped. He was quite aware that his late companion in peril had, up to seven o'clock that evening, been looked upon by his father, his sister, and Miss Agnes Winter as a person who was not quite a gentleman. The question now was whether the last four hours had made any difference in this

opinion; if so, what difference? He had intended to surprise his family with the manifest fact that if any Englishman had a right to the vague appellation, Tyars was distinctly entitled to it. Of the conveyance of this impression Oswin felt confident, but he was now wondering whether they had found out what sort of gentleman he was. It takes a good deal less than four hours to find out whether a person is a gentleman or not. It can be done in four seconds, for this is a mere matter of instinct; but it is quite another task to judge a man from a critical point of view—to decide whether one likes him or not. Respecting his father's impressions Grace was not very anxious; but for some reason which he did not attempt to define, he was desirous of hearing what Miss Agnes Winter thought of his friend Claud Tyars. He thought that he had detected a peculiar mutual attraction between these two. Tyars addressed his conversation more frequently to Miss Winter than to any one else, although he had in his manner recognized Helen as the only sister of his friend. Miss Winter had allowed herself to be interested in his remarks, and had even gone so far as to display warmth in more than one argument in which he came out the best. Oswin Grace had always looked upon Miss Winter as a firm friend. She represented in his eyes all that was perfect and fascinating in womanhood. His sister he looked upon as the incarnation of gen-

tleness and goodness; for few of us, unfortunately, allow our sisters the credit of being either perfect or fascinating. Although he had never lost sight of the fact that Agnes Winter was his senior by some years, his feelings toward her were more akin to love than to anything else. Their mutual relationship was one of those strange and dangerous anomalies that mislead men, and have misled them since the days of Plato. It will not be recorded what the world had to say about them, for that has remarkably little to do with the case. The world is pleased to pass off opinions as facts; and in this case opinion carried no weight, while the only fact of solid worth is that they were close friends. Grace did not give one the impression that he was suffering under blighted hopes; he displayed none of those petty jealousies, none of those airs of proprietorship, with which lovers harass the footsteps of the young person they admire. He had noticed this subtle sense of mutual understanding between the two persons whom he considered at that moment to be his dearest friends upon earth, and it is just possible that for the first time in his life he felt a slight pang of jealousy.

At all events he realized that Miss Winter's judgment of Tyars was, of the three, the most likely to be free from prejudice. If there was in his heart the slightest feeling of jealousy he was too loyal to allow such thoughts to influence his

friendship for Tyars, whom he honestly considered to be a better man than himself.

A German writer once made the remark that Prejudice is a more dangerous enemy to Truth than Falsehood; and it was doubtless in partial knowledge of this fact that Oswin Grace felt himself called upon to defend his friend. Most of us, especially when we were young, have experienced that sense of helpless disappointment which almost inevitably follows upon the bringing together of two dear friends hitherto unknown to each other. The fact of possessing a mutual friend is not, after all, such a strong and unexceptional tie as one would imagine. Grace was disappointed by the utter want of enthusiasm displayed by his sister and Miss Winter respecting the man whom he admired enthusiastically himself. He had purposely refrained from singing Tyars' praises because he felt confident that the man was capable of winning instant admiration without assistance. Perhaps he had unconsciously allowed this prejudice to grow up against him in his blind admiration for one whom he looked upon as worthy of universal respect. The young sailor was now burthened by unpleasant doubts as to whether Tyars had come through the ordeal with flying colours. He ignored the great difference in the circumstances of his own meeting with Tyars and that of his family.

The peculiar position of making a man's ac-



quaintance by saving his life is one from which a cool and deliberate criticism can hardly be made. From the very first he had felt himself drawn toward the incongruous castaway whose calm reception of events was calculated to appeal to the heart of every brave man. The friendship had grown from this tiny germ into a strong tree upon which mutual burdens might in years to come be hung. Tyars had come into the Brook Street drawing-room under more ordinary circumstances, and with no flourish of brave trumpets. Altogether the circumstances of the first visit were against him.

Oswin Grace was still meditating over these things when sleep overtook him; but he had in the meantime fully made up his mind to see Agnes Winter the next day.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE "ARGO"

It was not yet nine o'clock the following morning when Tyars left the door of the old-fashioned hotel where he was staying in the very heart of London. The usually busy streets were still comparatively empty. Washed-out housemaids in washed-out cotton dresses were dusting the front doorsteps of such old-world folks as were content to continue living on the eastern precincts of Tottenham Court Road.

As the young fellow walked briskly through some quiet streets and finally emerged into Holborn he was smoking a cigarette with evident enjoyment. In his dress there was this morning a slight suggestion of the yachtsman, that is to say, he was clad in blue serge, and his brown face suggested the breezes of ocean. Beyond that there was nothing to seize upon, no clue as to what this young man's calling or profession, tastes or habits, might be. He stopped occasionally to look into the shop-windows with the leisurely interest of a man who has an appointment and plenty of time upon his hands. Any one taking the trouble to follow him would have been struck with the singularity of his choice in

the matter of shop-windows. He appeared to take an interest in such establishments as a general dealer's warehouse. There is a large grocer's shop on the left-hand side of Holborn, half-way down, and here he stopped for a considerable time, studying with great attention a brilliant array of American tinned produce. A tobacco-nist's was treated with slight heed, while the wares of a large optician appeared to be of absorbing interest.

Thus he made his placid way eastward. At about nine o'clock he was nearing the General Post-office, and here he called a hansom cab. Down Cheapside, Cornhill, Gracechurch Street, into Eastcheap, and so on to Tower Hill, the driver guided his evil-tempered horse. The doors of St. Katherine's Dock had been open only a few minutes when Tyars passed through the building into the London Dock.

On the quay, under an iron-roofed shed at the head of the dock, a red-faced, red-bearded, clumsy man was walking slowly backward and forward with that idle patience which soon becomes second nature in men accustomed to waiting for weather and tides. When he perceived Tyars he lurched forward to meet him, expectorating hurriedly and surreptitiously with the evident desire of concealing from one side of his face the proceedings of the other.

Tyars acknowledged his jerky salutation with a pleasant nod, and they walked away together.

This burly son of the north was the man with whom Tyars had exchanged a shake of the hand one evening in a London theatre when Miss Winter was seated close by.

They walked the whole length of the dock, avoiding with an apparent ease, pitfalls in the way of ring-bolts, steam-pipes, and hawsers. At the lower end of the basin, moored to a buoy in mid-dock, lay a strange-looking little steamer. Her chief characteristic was clumsiness—clumsiness of hull, clumsiness of spar, and general top-heaviness. An initiated eye would account for it at once by the fact that this was one of those rare anomalies in English waters, a wooden steamer. Her bows were originally very bluff, and being now heavily encased in an outer armour of thick timber the effect was the reverse of pretty. She was rigged like a brig, and her tall, old-fashioned funnel, rearing its white form between the masts, suggested an enlarged galley-chimney.

Altogether she was the strangest-looking craft in the docks, where many quaint old ships are slowly rotting to this day. The London Dock is a sort of maritime home for incurables. Here are to be found strange constructions of oak and teak and pine; experiments in iron, abortions in steel. Commerce has almost left these waters for more convenient quarters lower down the river, and here vessels from all parts of the world, each and every one with its past history clinging to its old-world spars, humming through its hempen rig-

ging—here they find a last resting-place on the still and slimy water; here they rock no more to the roll of ocean, fight no more against adverse winds and foul weather. Their mouldering decks know not now the tread of quick bare feet, their bleached ropes hang idle, for the fingers that grasped them are limp and mouldering. The grass is peeping up between the stones of the quay, where in days gone by the ever-increasing wonders of India oozed odourously between the staves of their clumsy casks. The jaggery is washed out from the crannies in the pavement, the plumbago has vanished from the walls, and through the vast warehouses reigns a solemn silence.

All things in this home for incurables suffer from the same disease, and one for which there is alike no cure and no mercy in these times. A deadly slowness pervades them all. It is the leprosy branded on the old sad ships and written on the rusted chains of the old hand-cranes, now utterly and hopelessly superseded by hydraulic power. The grim warehouses with their narrow entrances, their inconvenient passages and awkward doorways, tell the same tale. They lack the power of speed; when they were built rapidity was not a human virtue.

In the midst of this Tyars and his uncouth companion stood gazing out into the middle of the basin toward the ugly steamer. It was said among the dock-labourers and custom-officers

that the vessel had been built at Trontheim in Norway for a steam-whaler; that she had been bought by an Englishman, and was now being leisurely fitted out under the supervision of the red-haired Scotchman who lived on board. Her destination was a profound mystery. Some thought that she was to be a whaler, specially fitted for the "north water"; others boldly stated that she was destined to open up commerce with China by the Northeast passage. But it was nobody's business to inquire, and speculation is a form of conversation much affected by persons who lounge about the water's edge. The ship's account was regularly paid by a West-end lawyer, and beyond that the Dock Company had no inclination to inquire.

"I think," said Tyars, critically, as he stood examining the little steamer, "that you have got on splendidly, Peters. She looks almost ready for sea."

"Ay . . ." responded the red-faced man slowly.

He was no great conversationalist. With his great head bent forward he stood beside the tall, straight man, and in his attitude and demeanour there was a marked resemblance to a shaggy, good-natured bear. His small green eyes, deeply hidden beneath red-gray brows, twinkled speculatively as he took in every rope and spar.

"You have got the new foremast up, I see. A good bit of wood?"

"Fine!"

He shook his head sadly from side to side at the mere thought of that piece of wood.

"And the standing-rigging is all up?"

"Ay . . ."

"And the running-rigging ready?"

"Ay; them riggers was fools."

Tyars smiled in an amused way and said nothing.

A boat now put off from the strange steamer and came toward them. A small boy, standing in the stern of it with his legs apart and his back turned toward them, propelled it rapidly with half an oar. Presently it came alongside some slimy steps near to them, and the two men stepped into it without speaking. There was something hereditary in the awkward manner in which the boy jerked his hand up to his forehead by way of salutation. They all stood up in the boat, the older men swaying uncomfortably from side to side at each frantic effort of the boy with the half-oar.

When they reached the steamer Tyars clambered up the side first, stepping on board with the air of a man well acquainted with every corner of the ship. He looked round him with an unconscious pride of possession, at which a yachtsman would have laughed, for there was no great merit in being the owner of such a ludicrous and strange craft. Peters, the red-faced sailor, followed, and a minute examination of the vessel

began. Below, on deck, and up aloft, the two men overhauled together every foot of timber, every bolt and seizing. The taciturn old fellow followed his employer without vouchsafing a word in praise of his own handiwork. He did not even deign to point out what had been done, but followed with his head bent forward, his knotted fingers clasped behind his back. As it happened there was no need to draw attention to such details, for here again Tyars displayed the unerring powers of his singular memory. No tiny alteration escaped him. There seemed to be in his mind a minute inventory of the ship, for without effort he recalled the exact state of everything at an earlier period, vaguely designated as "before I went away."

No improvement however small escaped comment, and yet the praise was very moderate. In this matter he might well have allowed himself some license, for the work was almost faultless. It was a marvellous record of steady, untiring industry. From morning till night through many months this ship's carpenter had toiled at his labour of love. Unurged by any master beyond his own conscience, he had worked while daylight lasted, lying down to rest in the floating scene of his labours when the day was done. He had been purposely allowed *carte blanche* in the matter of materials, and a large limit respecting time. In this Tyars gave evidence of a deep knowledge of men—that instinctive knowledge without



which no commander, no leader of his fellows, ever yet made his mark in the world.

When the inspection was finished the two men walked slowly aft, and standing there beside the high, old-fashioned wheel they gazed forward, taking in slowly and deliberately every detail of rigging and deck.

"I believe," said Tyars at length, "that I have found the man I want—my first mate."

The twinkling green eyes sought the speaker's face unobtrusively.

"Ay," said the old fellow in a non-committing voice.

"A royal navy man."

There was the faintest whistle audible in the stillness of the deserted dock. Tyars looked down at his companion, whose gaze was steadily riveted on the foretopgallant mast. The whistle was not repeated, but the straightforward sailor disdained to alter the form of his twisted lips.

"I had," continued Tyars, calmly, "another very good man—cook and steward—but he died of yellow fever."

Peters turned slowly and contemplated his employer's face before answering—

"Ay . . ."

It was a marvellous monosyllable. In its limited compass he managed to convey his knowledge of Tyars' late exploit—his entire approval of the same—and his regret that the good cook

and steward should have been called to another sphere while there was, humanly speaking, still work for him to do here below.

Then he stood stock-still with his misshapen lips pressed close together. His grizzled mustache and short beard (of which each individual hair seemed to be distorted with a laudable endeavour to out-curl its neighbour) were somewhat discoloured by tobacco smoking and the indulgence of another evil habit connected with consumption of the same weed. Tyars glanced at him, and saw in every curve of his powerful frame, every line of his scarified face, a stubborn, ruthless contempt for all wearers of her Majesty's uniform at sea. The old sea-dog had no patience with the drawing-room manners observed (and necessarily observed) on the decks of her Majesty's ships. He was displeased that Tyars should have become acquainted with a naval man to whom he thought of entrusting a post of importance, but true to his stubborn habits of silence he would not speak of it. Tyars knew well enough the thoughts that were passing through the mind of his companion. He ignored however the naval man, and went on to talk of the steward last mentioned.

"This fellow," he said, "was just the sort of man I want. Plenty of hard work in him, and always cheerful. Sort of man to die laughing, which in fact he did. The last sound that passed his lips was a laugh."

Peters nodded his head in a large and comprehensive way. At times he was desperately literal, but there were occasions when he could follow a thought only half expressed. His lips parted, but no sound came from them. In any case it would only have been the weighty monosyllable with which this ancient mariner attempted to work off his conversational liabilities.

As they were standing there, Peters the younger emerged from the small galley amidships, bearing a tin filled with potato-peelings which he proceeded to throw overboard. Seeing this, the proud father eyed his employer keenly, and moved from one sturdy leg to the other. He clasped and unclasped his hands, while his jaw made a slight motion as if to bestow more conveniently some object located in the cheek. All these symptoms denoted a great effort on the part of the ship's carpenter. He was, in fact, about to make a remark. At last he threw up his head boldly.

"And the lad?" he said, with some abruptness.

Tyars looked critically at the youth, momentarily engaged in expelling the last few pieces of potato-skin adhering to the tin, and made no answer. His face hardened in some indescribable way, and from the movement of mustache and beard it seemed as if he were biting his lip.

"There's plenty o' work in him—an' he's cheerful," almost pleaded the man.

Tyars shook his head firmly. Had Miss Winter seen his face then, she would have admitted readily enough that he was a man with a purpose.

"He is too young, Peters."

The carpenter shuffled awkwardly to the rail, and having expectorated viciously, returned with his dogged lips close pressed.

"Have ye thowt on it?" he inquired.

Tyars nodded.

"I'd give five years o' my life to have the lad wi' us," he muttered.

"Can't do it, Peters."

"Then I winna go without him," said Peters, suddenly. He thrust his hands into his trousers-pockets and stood looking down at his own misshapen boots.

The faintest shadow of a smile flickered through Tyars' eyes. He turned and looked at his companion. Without the slightest attempt at overbearance he said pleasantly —

"Yes, you will . . . and some day you will thank God that the boy was left behind."

Peters shrugged his shoulders and made no answer. For the first time in his life he had met a will equal to his own in stubbornness, in purpose. And it was perhaps easier to give in to it because in method it differed so entirely from his own. It is possible that in the mere matter of strength Peters was a mental match for his employer, but Tyars had the inestimable advantage

of education. Neither equality, nor fraternity, nor liberty can stand against education.

Admiral Grace in taunting Tyars with his Cambridge honours had unwittingly laid his finger upon the weakness of his entire generation. In his time a scientific sailor had been unknown. Tyars belonged to a later class of seamen, as indeed did his friend Oswin Grace, and both men were conscious of their own superiority in seamanship over the sailors of Admiral Grace's day, though they were too wise to betray their knowledge.

It was this reserve of knowledge which rendered the result of a struggle between the stubborn Scotchman and his employer a foregone conclusion. And as Tyars clambered nimbly down the side of the little wooden steamer, the carpenter was vaguely conscious of defeat.

The little boat was urged to the shore in the usual jerky manner, while the clumsy, red-faced sailor stood watching from the deck. He noted how Tyars was talking to the boy, who laughed at times in a cheery way.

"Ay," muttered Peters, with a short, almost bitter laugh, "there's some that is born to command."

As Tyars passed out of one gate of the London and Saint Katherine's Dock, a lady entered the premises by another. They passed each other unconsciously within a few yards. Had either

been a moment earlier or a moment later they would have met.

The imposing gate-keeper touched his hat respectfully to the lady, who was Miss Agnes Winter.

## CHAPTER VIII

### IN THE CITY

CLAUD TYARS walked through the narrow streets, westward, without noticeable haste. His gait was neither that of the busy city merchant nor the easy lounge of the sailor out of work. On Tower Hill and in Trinity Square these two classes almost monopolize the pavement. He was therefore somewhat remarkable, and more than one sailor turned back to look at the keen-eyed man, who had honoured him with such an obvious glance of interest; for Claud Tyars had a habit of looking at his fellows in the peculiar gauging manner which Miss Grace had detected.

It was not an offensive habit, but still somewhat noticeable. We have all seen artists look at the sky or the sea or a landscape with a skilled analyzing glance. In like manner the botanist examines growing things, or the jockey his horse. It was in this way that Tyars looked at some men, notably at sailors. Some of them, especially those in search of a ship, almost touched their hats in response. To a certain extent they were justified, because Tyars seemed almost to be seeking some one.

When he reached the broader streets and fuller thoroughfares of the city proper, his eyes grew more restful. The man or men he sought were evidently innocent of a silk hat. He passed through Eastcheap and up Gracechurch Street, failing to take advantage of certain small passages and time-saving thoroughfares in a manner which betrayed his ignorance of his whereabouts. He looked about him inquiringly, but made no attempt to ask his way. Presently he seemed to recognize some familiar landmark, for he went on, crossed Cornhill, and proceeded up Bishopsgate Street. He turned suddenly up a narrow passage on the left-hand side of the street, and pushing open a swing-glass door, climbed a flight of lead-covered steps. On the second floor he stopped before a door bearing on a small brass plate the name, M. M. Easton. Without knocking he opened the door, and on his entrance an elderly man rose from his seat at a low table, and after a quick glance lowered his colourless gray eyes, bowing gravely. Tyars returned the salutation with a short nod.

The elderly man then turned to go into a room beyond the small bare office, and the most casual observer could hardly have failed to notice a singularity in the contrast thus afforded. When he turned his back, this city clerk was no longer elderly. His back was that of a young man. Addressing himself to some unseen person in the inner room, he uttered two words only—the



name of the Englishman waiting in the outer office—without prefix or comment.

"Come in, Tyars!" called out a cheerful tenor voice immediately, and the clerk turning, and turning, so to speak, into an old man again, stepped aside to let the visitor pass through the doorway.

The man who rose to greet Tyars, holding out a thin hand across the table at which he had been seated, was singularly slight. His narrow shoulders sloped at a larger angle from the lines of his sinewy neck than is usually to be found in men of the Anglo-Saxon race. The hand held out was unsteady, very white and long, while the formation of each joint and bone was traceable. The face was narrow and extremely small; at school Matthew Mark Easton had been nicknamed "Monkey" Easton. Despite his youthful appearance, it was some years since he had left school, and indeed men of his year at Harvard were mostly married and elderly while Easton still retained his youth. In addition to this enviable possession there was still noticeable in his appearance that slight resemblance to a monkey by which he had acquired a nickname singularly appropriate. It was not only in the small intelligent face, the keen anxious eyes and thin lips, that this resemblance made itself discernible, but in quickness of glance and movement, in that refined and nervous tension of habit which is only found in monkeys of all the lower animals.

By way of greeting, this man whistled two or three bars of *See the Conquering Hero comes*, softly through his teeth, and pointed to a chair.

"Smith," he said, raising his voice, "you may as well go to the bank now with those cheques."

There came no answer to this suggestion, but presently the door of the outer office closed quietly.

"I call him Smith," continued Easton, in a thin and pleasant voice spiced by a distinct American accent, which to Anglo-Saxon ears lent humour to observations of an ordinary and non-humorous character, "because his name is Pavloski. There is a good honest English ring in the name of Smith which does not seem so much out of place when he has his hat on as you might imagine. That unfortunately luxuriant crop of gray hair standing straight up gives him a foreign appearance, which the name of Pavloski would seem to confirm. Besides, it takes such a long time to say Pavloski."

While he was speaking, Easton's face had remained quite grave and consequently very sad. Such faces as his know no medium, they are either intensely humorous or intensely sad. He spoke lightly, and seemed to be giving very little real attention to what he was saying. On the other hand his small brown eyes were restless, they moved from one part of his companion's person to another as if seeking some change which was not visible.

There was a short silence. Both had much to say, and they appeared to be thinking and searching for a suitable beginning. Easton spoke first.

"I see," he said, "that you are trim and taut, and ready as usual. The executive keeps up to the mark."

Although he spoke with business-like terseness his accents were almost irresponsible, like those of a woman. For most women pass through life without ever incurring a full responsibility. They usually lay half the burden on the shoulders of some man in their proximity.

"Yes," replied Tyars, "my department is in working order. The ship is getting on well, and I have found my first officer."

The slight delicate man looked at his companion's large limbs and half suppressed a sigh. His wistful little face contracted into a grave smile, and he nodded his head.

"I dislike you," he said, in his peculiarly humorous way, "when you talk like that. It seemed to imply an evil sense of exultation in your physical superiority, which, after all, is fleeting. You are only dust, you know. But—but it is rather poor fun staying at home and pulling strings feebly."

"It has its advantages," said Tyars, in an unconsciously thoughtful tone, which brought the restless eyes to his face at once. "Besides," he added more lightly, "you do not pull feebly."

The tugs are pretty strong, and the strings you must remember reach a good distance."

"Ye—es!" Matthew Mark Easton had a singular habit of elongating the little word into several syllables, as if in order to gain time for thought. He would say "y—e—e—s," and fix his eyes on one in a far-off way which was at times rather aggravating. One felt that he was mentally wondering all the time why one wore such as ugly scarf-pin, or tied one's tie in such a shapeless heap.

"Ye—es! I suppose it has. But," he said, rousing himself, "I have not been idle. That is to say, Smith—Pavloski Smith, you know! He has been working terrifically hard. Poor devil! His wife is out there—at Kara."

"Yes—I know. You told me," interrupted Tyars, and his manner unconsciously implied that a fact once imparted to him was never forgotten. "Has he heard from, or of, her yet?"

"No; not for two years! He believes she is alive still, and a report came from Riga that she has been sent to Kara."

The Englishman listened without comment. His strong bearded face was not pleasant to look upon just then, for the massive jaw was thrust forward, and there was a peculiar dull glow in his placid eyes.

"There was a child, you know," continued the American, watching the effect of his words, "to be born in prison—in a Siberian prison,

where the attendants are the riff-raff of the Russian army—more brutes than men. That would probably be a year ago.”

He paused, his thin voice lowering toward the end of the sentence in a way that rendered his American accent singularly impressive in its simple narrative.

“I wonder,” he continued, “what has become of that refined lady and that helpless infant—now. It brings the thing before one, Tyars, in rather a bright light, to think that that man Sm—Pavloski, who comes here at half-past nine every morning, goes out to lunch in a small eating-house next door, and goes home to his Pentonville lodging at five o’clock—that that man has a wife in a Siberian prison. A *wife*—a woman whom he has lived with every day—day after day; whose every tone, every little gesture, every thought, is familiar to him. I surmise that it must be worse than being in a Siberian prison oneself!”

It is easy to set down the words, but to render the slight twang, the jerky power of expressing pathos that lay hidden in this man’s tongue, is a task beyond any pen. In most voices there lies a speciality. No one can go to a theatre, upon the stage of which a language comprehensible to him is spoken, without hearing this. Some there are possessing a peculiar ring which tells of passion, others a light tone which is full of natural humour. Each may play through his part indifferently until a few lines come which enable him

to show his speciality, and after that, until the fall of the curtain, he seems a different man. He has proved his right to be upon the stage.

Matthew Mark Easton probably knew the powers of his own voice. His quick eyes could not fail to see it written upon the immovable features of the big cold-blooded Englishman opposite to him. Doubtless this was by no means the first time that ordinary everyday words had gained something from his enunciation of them. Doubtless Tyars was not the first strong man that this small American had fascinated and turned according to his own caprice.

"I suppose," he continued, in his slow, thoughtful way, "that most of us outsiders, English, Americans, and Frenchmen, are in the habit of laughing a little at these fellows—these so-called Nihilists, Terrorists, Propagandists. We think them too high-flown, too dramatic, too mysterious. But lately I have begun to suspect that there is a good deal of realism in it all. Smith—why, d——n it, man—Smith is painfully real. There is no humbug about Smith. And most of them—all the men and women I have had to deal with—are in the same boat as he."

Tyars stopped him with a quick gesture of the head, as if to intimate that all this was no news to him.

"Why," he asked curtly, "are you showering all this upon me? Do you think that I am the sort of fellow to turn back?"

Easton laughed nervously.

"Oh no!" he answered, in an altered tone. Then he turned in his chair, and unlocking a drawer in the pedestal of his writing-table, he drew forth several leather-bound books, which he set upon the table in front of him. "Oh no!" he said, turning the pages. "Only you seemed to be of opinion just now that the pastime of staying at home and pulling strings had its advantages."

"So it has," was the cool reply; "but that in no way alters the case as far as I am concerned."

"Then I apologize," said Easton, raising his eyes without moving his head; "I thought . . . perhaps—well, never mind!"

"What did you think?"

"I had a sort of notion that some other interest had sprung up—that you were getting sick of all this long preparation."

"And wished to back out?" suggested Tyars.

As he spoke he looked up, and their eyes met. A strong contrast—these two pairs of eyes. The one, large, placid, intensely English; the other, quick, keen, and restless. Although Easton's gaze did not lower or flinch, his eyes were not still; they seemed to search from corner to corner of the large glance that met his own.

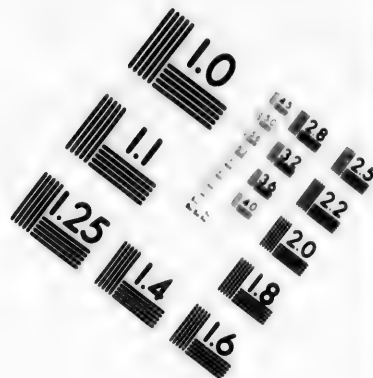
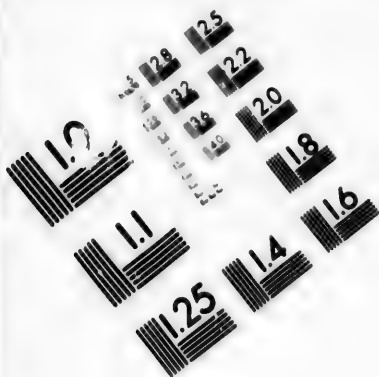
"I am afraid," he said, ignoring the question, "that I am getting a trifle sceptical. I have had more than one disappointment. Our doctor—Philippi, you know—has been appointed sanitary

inspector to the town of Lille, or something equally exciting. He has intimated that while fully sympathizing with our noble scheme, he can only help us now with his purse and his prayers. I do not know much about his purse, but the practical value of his prayers will, I suspect, be small. I do not imagine that his devotions offered up at his bedside in Lille will assist you materially to steer through the ice on a dark night in the sea of Kara."

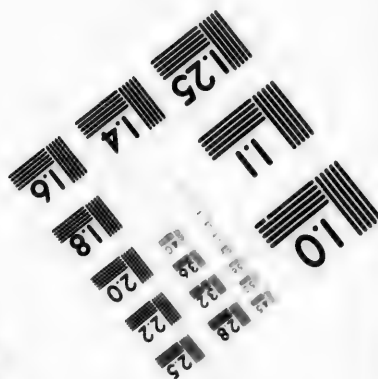
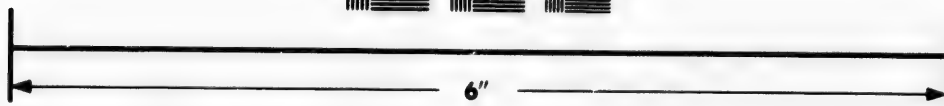
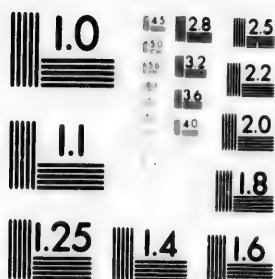
Tyars did not take up the question of the efficacy of prayer in this case or in general. As has been intimated, he was one of those Englishmen, who, in their cultivation of the virtue of independence, almost reduce it to a vice. Upon most matters and most questions he held decided views, which, however, he felt in no way moved to impart to others. He was utterly without kith or kin in the world, a fact of which the recognition greatly influenced his whole life, and being a lone man he was one of those who never see the necessity of opening his soul to others.

"It comes, no doubt," he said, half apologizing for the French doctor's treachery, "from his failure to realize the whole thing. The nation took up the question of the slave-trade without a moment's hesitation, and that was one upon which there were undoubtedly arguments upon both sides, of equal weight. We are not sure now that the comparatively small proportion of the human race victimized by the slave-trade has





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really benefited (at least so a man connected with its suppression has told me) by the action of England. Upon this question there can be no doubt whatever. The state of Russia and her system of government is a disgrace to the whole world—yet the whole world closes its eyes to the fact. The Siberian exiles, in my estimation, call for more sympathy than those thick-skinned, dense-brained niggers."

Easton said nothing. His father had been a slave-owner, but the fact was unknown to Tyars, and he did not think it necessary to mention it. In America a man stands upon his own legs. Ancestral glory is of much less importance than in the old country, and consequently the possession of forefathers is a blessing held cheap. In this matter Easton had no reason to fear investigation, for his family was of ancient standing in the South, but he never mentioned his forefathers, immediate or remote, because the subject had in his eyes no importance. He was an American, and followed the custom of his country. Had the slave-trade never been suppressed Matthew Mark Easton would have been one of the richest men in America. As it was, he sat daily in this little office in the city of London conducting—to all outward appearance—a small and struggling commission agent's business. It was somewhat characteristic of the man and his country that Tyars should be allowed to remain in ignorance of these matters.

Easton now turned to the leather-bound books, and the two men sat far into the day discussing questions strictly technical and strictly confined to the fitting out of the small vessel lying in the London Dock, for an expedition to the Arctic Seas. Even in the discussion of these details each man retained his characteristic manner of treating outward things. Easton was irresponsible, gay and light, while beneath the airy touch there lurked a truer, firmer grasp of detail than is possessed by the majority of men. His queer little face was never quite grave, even while speaking of the most serious matters. His manner was, throughout, suggestive of the forced attention of a schoolboy, ready to be led aside at the slightest interruption, while the relation of hard facts and the detailing of long statistics ran from his glib tongue without the least sign of effort.

Tyars listened for the most part, but here and there he put in a suggestion or recalled a fact in a way which betrayed a mind singularly capable of grasping and retaining details in such widespread variety that greater things could hardly fail to be influenced by such a mass of stored-up knowledge. Without formulating any theory, this man seemed to take human life more as a huge conglomeration of details than a comprehensible whole. There can be little doubt that such men are right in their estimate of human existence, for it is these and such as these who

make a mark upon the historical records of the world. The ladder of fame has crumbled centuries ago. To that high bourn there is no ladder now, but those who wish to climb there will find beneath their feet a huge misshapen rubbish-heap. This heap is the accumulation of centuries. Generation after generation has shot its rubbish there, and for us of later days there is nothing left but a hook and basket with which to rummage and dig for good things hidden beneath the mass of garbage wherewith to build a base to work upon.

## CHAPTER IX

### SEVEN MEN

MORE conspiracies have failed from impecuniosity than from treachery. If a man have money in sufficient quantity, secrecy is easily purchased. Even if he have enough to buy a respectable coat he is already on the high road to success. If the conspirators assemble in swallow-tail coats and white ties they are almost free from danger. Suspicion fixes herself upon the impecunious, the unfortunate, the low in station. She haunts the area-steps and flies at the luxurious sound of carriage-wheels. She never enters the front-door, but if she wishes to reach the upper floors, creepeth up the back stairs. Under the respectable shade of a silk hat, gloved and washed, any of us may trespass where he with but a shabby coat and forlorn boots will call down ignominy on his head. Well dressed we may steal horses, shabbily clad we must not even look over walls.

There was in the temperament of Matthew Mark Easton that small seed of aggressive courage which makes conspirators, agitators, and rebels of sensible men. He possessed all the non-conservative energy of his countrymen, with more than their usual thoughtfulness. Although

he had at different periods of his life studied more than one grave social question, he had not yet learnt to recognize that the solution of all such is not in the hands of individuals or even nations. The seed must indeed be sown by individuals, but its growth, its welfare or fall is beyond the influence of man.

During the record that follows, of a great scheme conceived six years ago, it may be patent to the understanding of many that Matthew Mark Easton was not the man for the position in which he found himself placed; that he was in fact a very round peg in a geometrically square hole.

Had Easton been told that he was destined to play an important part in a great conspiracy, he would have laughed his informant to scorn, and in this he would have been no better or worse than the majority of us. He was not by any means conspicuously possessed of organizing powers, but was merely a clear-headed, cool American, with a fair sense of enjoyment, and a good capacity for looking on the brighter side of things before the world if not in his inmost heart. A thin, slightly-built man with hollow cheeks is never an optimist, but he may incline to the brighter side while contemplating life with considerable discrimination.

Under the influence of such men as Tyars and Pavloski, he was capable of developing great energy, and there is little doubt that these two, unconsciously working together, forced the

American to assume a gradually increasing weight of responsibility, to the dimensions of which he remained partially ignorant.

In persuading Tyars to espouse a cause of which the particulars will be hereafter narrated, Easton had, some years previously, unwittingly cast his own lot with that cause to a greater and fuller extent than his easy-going nature would ever knowingly have allowed. He had set the torch to a brand of which the flames soon enveloped him. Meeting Tyars at an international aquatic competition, a friendship had sprung up between them, both being lonely men with no sisters or cousins to admire their prowess. Keen searchers into human motives might be inclined to aver that the fact of their being by no means rivals had something to do with the formation of this sudden friendship between two reserved men. Tyars was entered to row in the competition, while Easton had brought his sailing canoe.

It is just possible that Easton was to some extent carried away by his own peculiar eloquence, which lay as much in intonation as in words.

These slight retrogressive explanations will serve perhaps to make clear the position of Matthew Mark Easton with regard to Claud Tyars in the events that follow. To some extent the outcome of these past incidents was a dinner-party given by the American one November evening, six years ago, in his spacious rooms on the first floor of No. 176 Gordon Street, Russel Square.



Of those assembled some are living to this day, but others though young in years are now dead, leaving to the survivors the memory of a brave example, the unanswered question of a useless life, lived and lost without apparent benefit to any concerned.

There was nothing singular or remarkable about the fare provided. It was in fact supplied "all hot" by a neighbouring confectioner; but the guests formed as unique a collection of feasters as could well be found even in the metropolis of England.

Among the first to arrive was Smith—"P. Smith," as Easton playfully called him. The old young clerk of the little office in the city, Pavloski Smith, was dressed in irreproachable swallow-tail coat and white tie. His shirt-studs, however, were larger than usually worn in the best circles, and the precious stone of which they were formed was amethyst, which in some degree stamped him as a foreigner who had not lived long in England.

He shook hands with Easton, bowing his gray head in a peculiar jerky manner, as if they had not parted at the office two hours before.

After him came at intervals three men; the first elderly and stout, the other two younger; but all alike had that peculiar repose of manner which was especially noticeable in the man called Pavloski. They were evidently foreigners, these men, but it was not easy to say whether they were

of one nationality. They spoke English remarkably well, and made few mistakes in grammar. The linguistic fault possessed by all alike was a certain labial effort, which savoured neither of the heavy deliberation of the German, nor of the carelessness of the Gaul. Their tongues and lips seemed always to be on the trapeze, and a series of *tours de force* was the result. Their English was too colloquial in contrast to their accent and tone of voice.

Easton received them with a few words of welcome.

"Tyars," he said to each in turn, "has found a gentleman who will serve as first officer. He brings him to-night."

"Is," inquired the stout man, who was of a somewhat ceremonious habit,— "is Mr. Tyars well?"

"Quite well, thanks; at least I surmise so," was the answer.

The two younger men heard the news without comment.

Without awaiting an invitation, Pavloski drew a chair forward to the hearth-rug and sat there directly in front of the fire, holding his two hands out toward the warmth. In this position it became evident that he was a contemporary of the two younger men, who presently moved toward the fire, and stood talking together in their peculiar English, while Easton and the stout gentleman exchanged meaningless platitudes.

The three younger men had thus grouped themselves together, and when placed in proximity there was some subtle point of resemblance between them which could not at first sight be defined. It lay only in the eyes, for in build and complexion there was no striking likeness. Each of these three men had a singularly slow glance. They raised their eyes to one's face rather after the manner of a whipped dog, and when looking up there was noticeable a droop of the lower lid which left a space of white below the pupil of the eye. It may be seen in men and women who have passed through great hardship or an unspeakable sorrow. Such eyes as these speak for themselves. One can tell at once that they have at one time or other looked upon something very unpleasant.

It was not yet seven o'clock, but Easton appeared in no way surprised or disconcerted at the early arrival of his guests. He was apparently acquainted with the etiquette of the nation to which they belonged. Presently a servant entered the room bearing a tray upon which were bottles containing liqueurs, and a few small plates of biscuits. This was set down upon a side-table, and each guest in turn helped himself without invitation. They did this quite naturally. In Russia hospitality is differently understood and dispensed.

While this preliminary course was under discussion, the door was thrown open, and Tyars

entered the room, closely followed by Oswin Grace.

Strange to say an introduction was necessary between Grace and the American. Guest and host met for the first time. Then followed a general introduction, and it is worthy of note that the three younger foreigners instantly grouped themselves round the young officer. Their taciturnity was at once laid aside, and they chatted cheerfully and intelligently with the stranger until dinner was announced.

There were thus seven partakers of the good things provided by a neighbouring confectioner—four Russians, two Englishmen, and an American. There had been no secrecy about their coming; no mysterious taps at the door, no strange-sounding passwords. Moreover, the conversation was of a simple, straightforward nature, without dramatic relief in the way of ambiguous and irrelevant remarks respecting the length of some allegorical night and the approach of a symbolic dawn. Some astute reader has no doubt been on the alert for pages back, looking for these inevitable signs of a Nihilistic novel. But this is no such novel, and these seven gentlemen were not Nihilists. If the motive that brought them together had nothing in common with the maintenance of law, the fault lay in the utter futility of the law, and not in their desire to frustrate it.

It has already been noted that Oswin Grace

had not previously made the acquaintance of Easton, his host on this occasion, and the additional statement is worthy of attention that Tyars had in no way influenced the young sailor. He had merely handed him the formal invitation, adding that the dinner was an excuse for calling together a certain number of men for the purpose of laying before them the details of a great scheme. He further represented that an acceptance of the invitation was in no way binding as to future movements, and in no degree a committal to enter into the scheme propounded.

Upon this footing Oswin Grace accepted the invitation. It may appear that he was inveigled into a wild scheme by foul means, but to this construction both Easton and Tyars were deliberately blind. Tyars had settled in his own mind that the naval officer was a fit and good man for his purpose, and that appeared to be sufficient salve for his own conscience. A man who is fully absorbed in some great plan and throws himself wholly and entirely into it, must be held free from blame if he drag others with him. Failure comes to some, of course, and we often know not why; but most of us have perforce to shut our eyes to the possibility of its advent all through life. The fear of responsibility is the greatest drag upon human ambition that exists, and those men who suffer from it never make a forward step in the world, never rise above the dense level of mediocrity, never leave the ranks

of those human cattle who are content to be dumb and driven all their lives.

After dinner, when cigarettes had been produced, Easton at last condescended to explanation. Chairs had been drawn round the fire; the cigarette-box stood upon the mantelpiece, wine-glasses and decanters on the table behind. While he spoke, the American kept his eyes fixed upon the fire. He smoked several cigarettes during the course of his remarks, and at times he moved his limbs nervously, after the manner of one who is more highly strung than muscular.

"Gentlemen," he said, in his peculiar slow drawl, and an immediate silence followed. "Gentlemen, I asked you to come here to-night for a special purpose, and not from the warmth of my own heart." He paused, and his six listeners continued smoking in a contemplative way which promised little interruption. "What I am going to tell you cannot be quite new to some, while to others I surmise that it will be very new. I won't apologize for talking about myself, because it is a thing I always do.

"There is a country in the map called the Dark Continent, but during the last few years it has come under my notice that Africa is as light as the heavenly paths compared to another land nearer to this old country. I mean Siberia. Now, I am not going to talk about Siberia, because there are four men in this room who know more than I do. In fact they know too much,

and it would not be a gentlemanly action to try and touch the feelings of some to the discomfort of others. Before I go on I will explain for a spell who we all are. Four of us are Russians. Of these four, one has a wife living in the Siberian mines, condemned by mistake; a second has a father living in a convict prison, almost on the edge of an Arctic sea; a third has been there himself. These three undertake what may be called the *desperate* part of our scheme. The fourth Russian is a gentleman who has the doubtful privilege of being allowed to live in Petersburg. His task is difficult and dangerous, but not desperate. Two of us are Englishmen—one has given up the ease and luxury of the life of a monied British sportsman; has, in fact, become a sailor for the deliberate purpose of placing his skill at our disposal. In addition to that he has opened his purse in a thoughtless and generous way which is not to be met with in my own country. Why he has done these things I cannot say. In Mr. Tyars' position I certainly should not have done so myself. His is the only name I mention, because I have seen portraits of him in the illustrated papers, and there is no disguising who he is. The rest of us have names entirely unknown, or known only to the wrong people. Some of the Russian names, besides possessing this unfortunate notoriety, are quite beyond my powers to pronounce. The second Englishman is a naval officer who, having shared

considerable danger with Mr. Tyars on one occasion, may or may not think fit to throw in his lot with him again. His decision, while being a matter of great interest to us, lies entirely in his own hands. He is as free when he leaves this room as when he entered it. Lastly comes myself ——"

The little face was very wistful while the thin lips moved and changed incessantly from gaiety to a great gravity. The man's hollow cheeks were singularly flushed in a patchy, unnatural way.

"I," he continued, with a little laugh, "I, well—I am afraid I stay at home. I have here a doctor's certificate showing that I should be utterly useless in any but a temperate climate. I am—consumptive."

He produced a paper from his pocket and held it in his hand upon his knee, not daring to offer it to any one in particular. There was a painful silence. No one reached out his hand for the certificate, and no one seemed to be able to think of something to say.

At last the stout gentleman rose from his chair with a grunt.

"I too stay at home, gentlemen," he said, breathlessly, "and I have no certificate."

He crossed the hearth-rug, and taking the paper from Easton's hand he deliberately threw it into the fire.

"There," he grunted; "the devil take your certificate."



Then he sat down again, adjusting his large waistcoat, which had become somewhat rucked up, and attempted to smooth his crumpled shirt, while the paper burnt slowly on the glowing coals.

"I only wished," said Easton, after a pause, "to explain why I stay at home. It is no good sending second-rate men out to work like this."

He paused and looked round. There was something critical in the atmosphere of the room, and all the seven men assembled looked at each other in turn. Long and searchingly each looked into the other's face. If Easton had set down the rule that second-rate men were of no avail, he had certainly held closely to it. These were at all events first-rate men. Not talkers, but actors; no blusterers, but full of courage; determined, ready, and fearless. The slight barrier raised by the speaking of a different tongue, the thinking of different thoughts, seemed to have crumbled away, and they were as brothers.

All was conducted with reserve and calmness. All things spoken were said simply. They sat there in their immaculate evening dress, smoking their cigarettes, sipping their wine—as dangerous a group of men as a tyrant ever had to fear.

"Our plans," said Easton, "are simple. We fit out a ship to sail in the spring, ostensibly to attempt the Northeast passage to China. Her real object will be the rescue of a large number of Russian political exiles and prisoners. The

three younger Russians go to Siberia overland. Theirs is the most dangerous task of all, the largest, the most important. The fourth remains in Petersburg to keep up communication, to forward money, food, disguises, and—arms. Mr. Tyars takes command of the steamer, which is now almost ready for sea, and forces his way through the ice—God willing—to the Yana river."

Easton stopped speaking. He rose and helped himself to a fresh cigarette. As he returned to his seat he glanced inquiringly toward Oswin Grace, whose eyes had followed him.

Grace removed the cigarette from his lips.

"Of course, gentlemen," he said, glancing comprehensively round the group, "I go with Mr. Tyars."

"Thanks!" muttered Tyars shortly.

## CHAPTER X

### MISGIVINGS

"OSWIN," said Helen Grace in her convincing way, "has changed."

Miss Agnes Winter, to whom this remark was addressed, appeared somewhat inclined toward contradiction, but failed to carry her impulse into practice.

The two ladies were seated in a comfortable drawing-room not far from Brook Street; the drawing-room of Miss Winter, who had not yet decided upon giving up the house in which her father had so recently died. At least she said that she had not yet decided, a statement which her more intimate friends were pleased to receive with caution. She was not the sort of person to hover long between two opinions; and when she said that her future movements were not yet decided, her keener-sighted friends knew that she was in reality desirous of withholding her decision from public comment. Although no longer a girl, she was hardly yet of an age to keep a house of her own and live without an older companion. She was too beautiful for that, perhaps, for beautiful women cannot be so independent as their plainer sisters. All distinctions carry with

them their own responsibilities; of these, the chief are beauty and riches. Far above genius, or purity, or goodness, or mere harmlessness are these two possessions in human eyes. Therefore the beautiful and the rich should be very careful. The old proverb which says that *noblesse oblige* is now extinct; its place taken by the tacitly acknowledged truism that *richesse oblige*.

Miss Winter did not reply at all. She read her companion's statement less as an implied question than as a text to a train of thought. Into thought she now therefore lapsed, her clever eyes half-closed, her graceful, rounded form reclining very comfortably in a low chair.

"Agnes," said Helen Grace again, with some sharpness, "I think Oswin has changed."

"Do you, dear?"

"Yes," continued Helen, idly turning the pages of an illustrated paper that lay on the table near her. "He is different toward us all—more especially, perhaps, toward you."

Miss Winter's smooth cheeks changed colour slightly. She raised her eyes and looked at her companion, until she in turn looked up and their glances met.

"Do you not think so?" inquired Helen, quite naturally.

"No—I think not; I have not noticed it. We have always been very good friends, you know. We are good friends still. There cannot well be much difference. People at our age do not drop

old friendships or make new ones so suddenly as that."

Helen returned to her illustrated paper.

"I think, you know," she hazarded lightly, "that Oswin is not very strong. I mean . . . he is rather impressionable; rather apt to be carried away by an impulse conceived on the spur of the moment."

The sun was shining in through one of the tall windows, in a yellow autumnal way, directly on to the fire, and Miss Winter rose to lower the blind. Then she went to the fire, and spent a few moments with the hearth-brush.

"Oswin is not weak," she said; "you are wrong there. As men and women go, he is strong. But—Claud Tyars is stronger. Mr. Tyars is *very* strong, Helen. He is one of those men who almost invariably influence all the lives that come in contact with their own. They are the leaven of humanity."

"Do you like him?"

Miss Winter shrugged her shoulders in a manner indicating that *her* life, at all events, was out of Tyars' influence.

"I like men to be strong—morally. Great physical strength generally finds itself accompanied by density."

Then Claud Tyars was allowed to drop. His character was not further discussed, although both women thought of him again; Helen because of his undoubted influence over her brother;

Miss Winter because, as she had said, she liked men to be strong.

Both ladies were aware of the change that had come over the young sailor, though Miss Winter refused to dilate upon the subject. Both had noticed the disappearance of a certain light-hearted irresponsibility, which was partly constitutional, and partly the outcome of governmental service. This sense of irresponsibility is usually noticeable in such as are in receipt of a certain stipend in return for the performance of certain duties rendered to the government. The state of mind of such persons bears no resemblance to that of a man whose existence is constituted of so many annual balances; whose daily butter, so to speak, varies in thickness according to the state of trade, of shipping, or of the sugar-cane.

Oswin's preoccupation could in no way be assigned to professional matters. He had influence at headquarters, and a very fair intelligence of his own. With these two, and a somewhat exceptional record of service, there was no cause for anxiety as to the future. While the two ladies were thinking over these things, the object of their thoughts happened to be standing on the pavement opposite to the drawing-room window, near which Miss Winter was seated. When at length she turned her head, she unconsciously betrayed her thoughts.

"There is Oswin," she said, and her surprise seemed greater than the occasion demanded.

"Is he coming in?" inquired Helen, without moving.

"Well, I suppose so. At present he is talking to two men, one of whom is Mr. Tyars . . . Helen."

Then Helen rose from her chair and approached the window, work in hand.

"Do not let them see you," interposed Miss Winter, stretching out her hand to prevent the girl's further progress.

Helen stopped, and after a glance down into the street continued working quietly. She did not, however, quit her post of observation.

"Why not let them see me, Agnes?" she inquired without much interest.

"Because Oswin is sure to look up, and if he looks up Mr. Tyars will do the same. Then our mysterious friend will take off his hat, and he might be constrained to come in."

"And," suggested Helen, lightly, "you do not want him to come in. Why not?"

Miss Winter laughed, and then looked gravely into the fire for some moments before replying.

"Not yet. I do not want him to come in yet," she said. "Because I like him. Despite a slight feeling of resentment which I cannot get rid of, I like Mr. Tyars, and I suppose he is destined to become one of our circle. If that is the case there is plenty of time. He means to do it, and he will do it without help from us. My experi-

ence leads me to distrust friendships of rapid growth. They invariably come to an untimely end."

Helen allowed her hands to drop, and ceased working. She looked down at the three men, more especially at Tyars, as if seeking a solution to the questions suggested by Miss Winter.

"Why should he want to become one of our circle?" she inquired innocently; and the question caused Miss Winter to raise those clever eyes of hers at last.

"My dear," replied the elder woman, "I do not know."

There was a certain ring in her voice which seemed to promise that the ignorance just acknowledged was not likely to be of long duration. What she really meant was, that at the moment she did not know, but that she was fully determined to find out.

Of course she suspected. She would not have been human had she not done so. She suspected that Claud Tyars was determined to become one of their circle preparatory to becoming the husband of Helen Grace. The details of their former meeting at Oxford had lately come to her knowledge. Small enough details in their way, but not too insignificant for the attention of a woman of the world. A ball, a picnic, a flower-show; a few words exchanged at each are of course trivial matters. But such trifles have before now influenced many a carefully-shaped scheme of



life, have undermined the loftiest ambitions, have turned gloomy fame into sunny insignificance.

Miss Winter had lived to see many of her contemporaries pass through this stage. Many of her girl friends had suddenly ceased to crave for artistic and literary fame. Among the sterner contemporaries there were a number now who appeared to be quite content with remunerative commercial occupations and easy government offices. In face of this experience it was only natural to class Claud Tyars among the rest, to mentally specify him as a man in possession of certain faculties above the average, and consequently as one who at an earlier period had cherished ambitions. These, like all youthful aspirations, were now fleeing before the practical thoughtfulness of middle age. They were giving place to a comfortable desire for contentment and ease.

This was Miss Winter's estimate of Tyars. The thing, she argued to herself, lay in a nutshell. The memory of Helen Grace had never quite left him. It had survived his young ambitions, and chance had done the rest. Tyars' peculiar friendship for Oswin was a mere means toward the end. But this practical young woman was far too astute to set down Tyars as an ordinary man. There was something about him which she could not understand. It could not be only his supposed love for Helen that gave him his singular air of purpose. Had he been a

boy his whole being might thus have been absorbed in a first love, but he was unquestionably over thirty years of age, and men of such years are dignified even in love.

Agnes Winter had given greater thought to this man than she was quite aware of. She was a quick thinker, and while her steady white fingers were employed in work her busy brain wandered far afield. She had sought right and left for a motive in Claud Tyars' existence. He was not of a literary mind, she knew that. He had not roamed about the world looking for something or somebody to write about, as many do. He was no modern knight-errant seeking adventure by sea and land. His life now was on the surface that of a well-to-do idle man of the world. He set up his booth in Vanity Fair as a lounge, and sought to impose upon the world. The more Miss Winter meditated the stronger grew her conviction that the idleness of Claud Tyars was a gigantic fraud, and when she informed Helen that she would rather that he did not come in, she knew in her heart that she had diverged slightly from the paths of Truth.

## CHAPTER XI

### ON THE TRACK

IN the meantime the three men showed signs of a move. Oswin stepped a little toward the edge of the pavement, and in doing so exposed the face and form of the third man to the view of the two ladies. This third person was Matthew Mark Easton, as yet a stranger to Miss Winter and Helen.

"What a peculiar-looking man!" said Helen at once. "Who is he?"

Miss Winter did not know. She said so indifferently, and then accorded him her full attention for some moments.

"A friend of Mr. Tyars, I suppose," she said at length. "He is like a very gentlemanly monkey."

Oswin was evidently persuading Tyars to come with him to call on Miss Winter, and Tyars was with equal evidence refusing.

At length Oswin gave up persuading, and with a nod left the two men to continue their way.

Helen and Miss Winter had watched this pantomime without comment, and its issue called forth no remark. They merely drew back into the room and recommenced their work.

Oswin Grace was shown in a moment later. He shook hands with Miss Winter and accorded to his sister a little nod, which seemed to indicate that her presence had been expected.

"It is nice," he said, rubbing his brown hands cheerily, "to see a fire. Outside it is simply suicidal. Such weather almost justifies the laying of violent hands upon oneself—just about this time in the afternoon. I should do it myself were I deprived of this fire, your society, and the anticipation of tea."

"Ring the bell then," replied Miss Winter, "and your anticipation shall be realized."

The young sailor obeyed, and returned to his station upon the hearth-rug with that breezy energy which can only be tolerated in small men. A large, energetic man is a nuisance and an anomaly.

"I have," he said, "just left Tyars."

It was a pity that he involuntarily glanced toward the window, because both ladies saw it, and the action betrayed the small fact that his failure to mention the presence of a third person was intentional.

Of course this suppression was fatal. It had the natural effect of arousing the curiosity of both women, and the curiosity of a woman of the world is a thing of which it is wise to be afraid.

In her own mind Miss Winter pigeon-holed the gentlemanly little man of unprepossessing exterior as a person to be investigated. She

promptly leapt to the conclusion that this man was in some way connected with Claud Tyars and Claud Tyars' possible purpose in life.

"When," she asked, innocently, "is Mr. Tyars going to sea again?"

Oswin Grace changed colour. The brown sunburn had vanished to a certain extent during the gloom of the last few weeks, and beneath it the little sailor's skin was soft and delicate; the sort of skin that blushes easily.

"Do you know," he said, with forced gaiety, "I have never asked him. One is apt to forget that he ever was a sailor when he has a frock-coat, a top-hat, and gloves."

"I do not believe that he ever was a real sailor," said Miss Winter, casually. "He may have navigated a ship, and boxed the compass, or taken in the weather-brace, or whatever sailors do at sea, but I do not call him a sailor."

Oswin Grace laughed and murmured —

"Perhaps not!" Then he changed the subject with evident relief. "Ah, here is tea."

"I should say," she observed, cunningly, "that you are an infinitely better sailor than Mr. Tyars."

Oswin rose to the gaudy bait at once, with that same eagerness which you, my brother, and I display when a pretty woman flatters our vanity.

"Oh no," replied he, unguardedly; "I do not think so. He is one of the boldest sailors I have ever met; no man carries on like Tyars, but . . ."

"Carries on!" interrupted Miss Winter, with a laugh. "I should not have taken him for that sort of man."

"Carries sail at night, I mean," explained the young fellow.

"Ah, I see. Will you have some more tea?"

After she had poured out a fresh cup she returned to the charge, casting a quick glance toward Helen, who was working with extraordinary enthusiasm.

"You said 'but' just now," she observed. "What was the sequence of that suggestive 'but'?"

Oswin Grace appeared quite willing to talk now. His reserve was not proof against Miss Winter's unscrupulous approaches.

"Well," he answered slowly, as if considering his remarks, "I think it is that he has not known failure. He appears to have been invariably successful."

"More people," said Miss Winter, in her decisive way, "have come to grief through success than through failure."

"Not that I think that Tyars will come to grief at all," said Oswin, hastily and unguardedly. He stopped short, and there was an awkward pause for a moment. Both ladies were working with a suspicious indifference to the conversation.

"I mean," he continued, more calmly, "that he will probably succeed all through life in what-

ever he undertakes. Have you ever noticed his memory?"

"Ye—s," acquiesced Miss Winter, threading her needle. "It is a singular memory; and I suppose memory is a gift which cannot lie fallow like others—like singing, or writing, or painting. It must be always at work, and one never knows when it may come to the fore."

Oswin Grace had no taste for the deeper researches of human science.

"Yes," he said, "I suppose so. As for me, I have no memory at all. In fact, all my gifts lie fallow; they are of the unobtrusive kind, so unobtrusive, in fact, that their presence is not even suspected of the multitude."

As Helen had told her friend plainly, there was a difference in Oswin's manner, but this difference was not openly investigated. There could, however, be only one explanation of it, and both women seized upon this unhesitatingly.

Helen was not subtle enough to attach importance to a small detail which had almost vanished from her memory. She had detected at the first meeting of Claud Tyars and Miss Winter signs of jealousy on the part of her brother. These the young sailor had suppressed as well as he could, but the scrutiny of his sister had penetrated through the veil of his reserve. This jealousy was now conspicuously absent. Oswin seemed to find pleasure in talking of Tyars to Miss Winter.

Now jealousy is a passion that never dies. While the cause of it is at hand, it lives and thrives. Helen noticed this absence, and it served in some degree to confirm her conviction that her brother had ceased to love Miss Winter. She did not know that dead love or dying love is untouched by jealousy. She did not know that jealousy must assuredly die long before love, and not shortly before. She did not know that a youthful infatuation, under its more dignified name of a first love, is a thing that perishes more often in proximity than in absence.

Miss Winter might have known more about these matters had she been able to take note of them from Helen's point of view. She was, however, the object of Oswin's short-lived jealousy, and had therefore failed to notice it. She was too experienced, possessed too much self-respect, to allow any person to guess that she also detected a difference in Oswin's manner toward herself. This fact alone betrayed that she assigned the same reason to the change as that assigned by Helen Grace.

She made no sign whatever; no slightest difference in her treatment of Oswin. Whether there had been pleasure for her in the knowledge of this man's silent love, or mere indifference, it is hard to say. Women of thirty who have lived every year, every day of their life since twenty, hold different views of the great universal human Motive than those held by young girls. There is



a certain independence, a confidence in the possession of the power of inspiring love, in beautiful girls, which is never found in beautiful women. Hence if the latter are desirous of still exercising this great feminine pleasure and delight, they are, as a rule, not only pathetic objects, but disagreeable ones to contemplate. Thus it is that a plain woman of thirty to forty is a pleasanter companion, a better woman, and a more profitable study than one who is or has been beautiful.

Miss Winter had reached that age at which both men and women begin to wonder less acutely whether their life is endowed with an object. She was therefore a contented creature; contented with small pleasures and trivial occupations; unharassed by great ambitions, undisturbed by envy, untouched by jealousy. No outward influence seemed capable of affecting her gentle serenity. Admiration caused no flutter within her heart. She had tasted it too often, drinking it deeply. She was only thirty, and when she wished she could make herself look much younger, for her figure, though smoothly rounded, was lithe, and her cheeks were still soft and full.

## CHAPTER XII

### CARTE AND TIERCE

It was almost a month later that Matthew Mark Easton stepped into the circle of which Miss Winter was to a certain extent the leading spirit. This lady had not been five minutes in the brilliantly-lighted rooms of a huge picture gallery in Pall Mall, before she singled out the little American. He happened to be talking to another insignificant, unobtrusive man, who tugged nervously at a gray mustache while he listened. This was one of the ablest envoys ever accredited to the Court of St. James by the United States.

Miss Winter knew most of the faces in the room, and among others that of the American Minister. Moreover, she recollected perfectly the form and features of Matthew Mark Easton.

The occasion was a vast assembly of the fashionable, diplomatic, artistic, and literary worlds for the collection of money and ideas toward the solution of a social problem now happily almost forgotten. That the majority of those assembled did not care a rap for the social problem was nothing surprising. In this they were only symbolic of the rest of mankind. Very few of us do

trouble our heads about social problems. We leave them to those acrimonious and long-winded gentlemen who write for the reviews. The tickets were a guinea each; there were choice refreshments at a stated and ruinous price; soft carpets, an exhibition of pictures, and the same of dresses. Several gentlemen also read papers on the subject under discussion, but that was in the small room at the end where no one ever went.

Claud Tyars was there of course. During the last month or two he had been going out so much that one almost expected to meet him, just as one expects to meet certain well-known faces at every assembly. Miss Winter saw him immediately after noticing Matthew Mark Easton, and before long he began to make his way across the room toward her. Wherever they had met during the last few weeks, Tyars had invariably succeeded in exchanging a few words with Miss Winter, seeking her out with equal persistence, whether Helen Grace were with her or no. If, as the lady opined, he was determined to become one of their intimate friends, he displayed no indecent haste, no undue eagerness; and in so doing he was perhaps following the surest method. He had not hitherto showed the slightest desire to cross the line which separates acquaintance-ship from friendship.

There was a mutual attraction existing between these two capable, practical people. There was

a vacant seat, for a wonder, beside Miss Winter which Tyars promptly appropriated.

"Who," she asked, after a few conventionalities had been exchanged, "is that gentleman talking to the American Minister, and apparently making him laugh, which is, I should think, no easy matter?"

"He is generally making some one laugh," replied Tyars. "His name is Easton—Matthew Mark Easton. The sort of name that sticks in the wheel-work of one's memory. A name one does not forget."

"And," added Miss Winter, lightly, "a face that one does not forget. He interests me—a little."

Tyars laughed at the qualification implied by the addition to the last two words.

"That is always something," he said. "A small mercy. He is one of my greatest friends—may I introduce him?"

"Certainly," murmured the lady, with a little bow of the head, and then she changed the subject at once.

"Helen," she said, "is not here to-night."

Tyars looked befittingly disappointed.

"She does not always care to leave the admiral, and he objects to dissipation on a large scale. Is that not so?" he suggested.

"Yes. That is the case to-night."

She wondered a little at his intimate knowledge of Helen's thoughts, but said nothing. It was

probable that he had heard this from Oswin, and his singular memory had retained it.

"Miss Grace," said Tyars, presently, "has a strong sense of duty, and is unconscious of it. An unconscious sense of duty is one of the best of human motives. At least it seems so to me."

Although Agnes Winter was bowing and smiling to an old lady near at hand, she had followed him perfectly.

"Well," she answered, "a sense of duty of any description is not a bad thing in these times. Indeed," she added, turning suddenly toward him, "a motive is in itself rather rare. Not many of us have motives."

Her manner implied as plainly as if she had spoken it: "We are not, all of us, like you."

There was something in the expression of his eyes that recalled suddenly their first meeting at the precise moment when he, entering the drawing-room, overheard a remark of hers respecting himself. It was not an unpleasant expression, but it led one to feel instinctively that this man might under some circumstances be, what is tersely called in France, *difficult*. It was merely a suggestion, cloaked beneath his usual repose of manner, but she had known many men of his class, some of whom had made a name in their several callings, and this same suggestion of stubbornness had come beneath her quick, fleeting notice before.

He looked gravely round the room, as if seek-

ing to penetrate beneath the smiles and vapid affectation.

"Oh," he said, placidly, "I am not so sure. There are a good many people who pride themselves upon steering a clear course. The prevailing motive to-night is perhaps a desire to prove a superiority over one's neighbours, but it is still a motive."

Miss Winter looked at him critically.

"Remember," she said, warningly, "that this is my element. The motives of all these people are my motives—their pleasures, my pleasures—their life, my life."

"Apparently so," he replied, ambiguously.

"So that," she pursued, "I am indicted of the crime of endeavouring to prove my superiority over my neighbours."

He laughed in an abrupt way.

"No more than myself."

"That is mere prevarication," she persisted gaily. "Tell me, please, in what particular this coveted superiority lies."

"In a desire to appear more aimless than you are," he returned gravely.

She laughed.

"I deny that. I plead not guilty," she said.

"I am a person of many motives, but the many receive their life from one source. That one source is an earnest endeavour to please myself in all things, to crowd as much pleasure and as much excitement into a lifetime as it will hold."

"Then," he said after a pause, "you are only one of the crowd after all."

"That is all, Mr. Tyars. Did you ever suspect me of being anything else?"

"I believe I did," he replied, with a more direct gaze than is allowed by the dictates of polite society.

She returned the gaze with serenity.

"Then please get rid of the idea," she said significantly.

There was a short pause, but it was not the silence of people who have nothing more to say to each other.

"Shall I," inquired Tyars, rising suddenly, "go and find Easton? I should like you to know him."

"I shall be most happy," she said, with one of her gracious little bows. As he moved away, she called him back almost as if she were loth to let him go, as if there were something still left unsaid between them.

"Tell me," she said, in a gaily confidential tone, "before you go, what is his speciality. I always like to know a stranger's chief characteristic, or if he has no characteristics, his particular hobby—whether, I mean, he is a botanist or a yachtsman, a fisherman or a politician. It is so much more convenient, you understand, to know beforehand upon what topics one must conceal one's ignorance."

She finished with a little laugh, and looked up into his face with keen worldliness.

The meaning of the glance was obvious, and he met her gaze with significant coolness.

"No, Miss Winter," he said, deliberately; "you have not found out my particular hobby or my chief characteristic yet."

She laughed without embarrassment.

"Not yet," she admitted.

Then he returned to the original question.

"I think," he said, "that Easton has no hobbies. His speciality is eloquence. He could almost persuade a certain stubborn quadruped to part with its hind legs. He was destined by the positive department of Providence for an orator, but the negative department, with its usual discrimination, gave him a weak chest, and therefore he is nothing."

"Absolutely nothing?"

"Well," answered Tyars, "he is an American merchant."

She nodded her head in a practical way.

"Thank you," she said. "Now I know something of him. I have to conceal beneath wreathed smiles the fact that I know absolutely nothing of American commerce, American politics, or oratory. I wonder," she added as an afterthought, "whether there is anything he can persuade me into doing."

"He might," suggested Tyars, "persuade you into the cultivation of a motive."

Then he turned and left her.

Matthew Mark Easton saw him approaching,



and broke off rather suddenly a waning conversation with his Minister.

"Easton," said Tyars, "come here. I want to introduce you to Miss Winter."

"Miss Winter," returned the American; "ominous name. Who is she?"

"She is a person of considerable influence in the Grace household. Do you understand?"

"No," replied Easton, pleasantly, "I don't."

"It is in Miss Winter's power to deprive us of Oswin Grace," explained Tyars, "if she cares to exercise that power."

Easton's face expressed somewhat ludicrously a passing consternation.

"Hang these women!" he muttered. "Does she," he inquired, "suspect something?"

"I think so," was the reply, "and, moreover, she is a clever woman; so be careful."

Easton laughed reassuringly. He was not afraid of clever women. Miss Winter must almost have heard the laugh, while there was still a smile on his face as he bowed before her.

"I have never," he said, as he seated himself, "been at an entertainment of this description before. I am only a beginner. In our country we manage things differently; and I cannot yet understand how so much talking and so little action can benefit any cause."

"But," said Miss Winter, "you are not new to England. There is nothing about you to lead one to that conclusion."

"Thank you," he replied, gravely. "My claw-hammer coat was made in Piccadilly, so I suppose it is all right."

He looked down at the garment in question, and dusted the sleeve lightly with a perfectly gloved hand.

"Do you like it?" he inquired, simply.

Miss Winter was becoming interested. She therefore quelled a sudden desire to laugh, and answered—

"Yes; it is a very nice coat."

"I am not," he said, after a pause, "new to England, but I have not moved—I think you call it—much in London society. I suppose the men do all the moving in your society?—they seem to. The women sit mostly still and wait till the men come to them. With us it is different."

"The women," replied this womanly lady, "are beginning to move with us, and from what I have seen of the result, I rather incline toward the old policy of sitting still."

He turned and looked at her with a little nod. There was in his queer restless eyes a distinct glance of approval.

"Yes," he said, "yes. So I should surmise. Our ladies are very fascinating, and very clever, and all that, but—but the young men do not seem to make such a pretty show of loving them as we read of in olden times. At all events they do not continue to show them that regard which,

I remember, my father showed toward my mother."

"I myself am a humble admirer of the womanly school."

"And I," added Easton. "Now," he continued, after a pause, "do tell me. What do all these good people think they are doing here to-night?"

"They think, firstly," replied Miss Winter, "that they are getting their names into the fashionable society papers. Secondly, that their natural or artificial adornment is creating a distinct impression. Thirdly, and lastly, that they are assisting in some indefinite way toward the solution of a problem of which the rudiments are entirely unknown."

"Then in England, as well as in my own country, charity is a recognized plaything of society," suggested Easton.

"Yes. We take it up in late autumn and winter, when there are no races, nor regattas, nor lawn-tennis parties."

"Ah, then," said the American, "society is very much the same here as elsewhere."

At this moment Oswin Grace passed within earshot of them. He heard the remark, and recognized the voice. When he turned, his surprise at seeing Miss Winter and Easton together was so marked as to cause a little frown to pass across the queer, wistful face of the American. He returned the young Englishman's comprehensive bow, however, with perfect equanimity.

"You know Oswin Grace?" inquired Miss Winter.

"Oh yes," was the cool reply, "Tyars brought him to my rooms one evening."

Miss Winter skillfully concealed her eagerness.

"They are great friends," she said, lightly.

"Ye—es. Yes. Tyars constantly talks of him."

"I suppose," continued Miss Winter, in the same indifferently conversational way, "that they have many interests in common; both being sailors. At least, I believe Claud Tyars considers himself a sailor now."

This was clever, and the wary little man paused. He felt convinced that Miss Winter knew less of the past life of Tyars than she would have him believe. Moreover, he suspected that she had never hitherto called him Claud Tyars. The implied familiarity was a trap, womanly, clever, and subtle; but Easton avoided it with equal skill. He maintained an easy silence. Immediately afterward, however, he made a blunder.

"Oswin," said Miss Winter, "is a great friend of mine, and I think Helen is my greatest friend."

"A sister?" inquired Easton, rashly.

"Yes. Mr. Tyars has not spoken of her then?"

"No. Tyars did not tell me that Grace has a sister."

There was a short pause. Perhaps the Ameri-

can heard the little sigh of relief given by his companion, marking, as it were, the relaxation of an effort. Such a sigh as an athlete gives when he has scored a success and his weary muscles fall into repose. He became instantly conscious of his blunder. He had been outwitted by this pleasant woman. He—Matthew Mark Easton—a born intriguer, a man with real genius for conspiracy.

"Ah!" reflected Miss Winter, "why has Mr. Tyars omitted to make mention of Helen's existence?" And with feminine intuition she made a hasty mental note of this important item.

"So," mused Easton, during the same pause, "there is a Miss Grace, and Tyars never mentioned her. I must be very careful. Seems to me that there are two men at stake here, not one; and I cannot afford to lose two sailors such as these."

Miss Winter was now drawn into a vortex of light-hearted idlers, bent upon a systematic inspection of the pictures; and from their ranks Easton took the first opportunity of dropping away unobserved. They did not speak again during the evening; but the little seed was sown—the little seed of mutual esteem or mutual dislike, as the case may be, which under either circumstance seems to draw some people together here in life; to spread its subtle tendrils, intertwined and knit together, until their united strength is a thing undreamt of.

"I seem," reflected Easton, subsequently, over a very good cigar, "to have met that little English lady somewhere before. Her way of speaking, and her method of expressing herself in a cheery way, as if nothing mattered very much, are familiar to me. I certainly have not seen her before in this vale of sorrow, as the lady writers call it. I wonder where I have met her."

It happened to fall to the lot of Claud Tyars to shut the door of Miss Winter's comfortable brougham; while Grace, who had helped her in, stood back and nodded a good-night.

The lady leant back against the soft cushions, and drew her cloak more snugly round her. The flashing light of street-lamp or carriage showed her face to be grave and thoughtful. She was realizing that Claud Tyars was something more than a mere lover of intrigue, making a mystery out of a very ordinary love affair. She was recognizing now that matters were more serious than she had at first considered them.

## CHAPTER XIII

### A MEETING

SOCIAL questions are of very slow growth. We fondly imagine that, in our days, that vague movement which we call Progress is making greater strides than hitherto. But if we judge from results it would seem evident that the world moves on at the same steady pace which marked its progress in olden times.

The greatest movement of the generation, at least the movement which has attracted the greatest amount of attention, has undoubtedly been the education of women. They demanded the same privileges as possessed by their sterner competitors. These have to all intents and purposes been granted them, and what is the result? George Eliots are no more numerous. The old Masters in Art and Music sleep on securely, for their fame is not yet dimmed by the productions of women who have had the incentive of their example to assist them.

Miss Winter sometimes fell a victim to longings for labour. She sometimes felt useless, and looked beyond the work that lay at hand for heavier labour. When she heard of good works done by women, she longed to do something also.

She gave way to this weakness, and she was very quiet about it. When the paroxysm was upon her she put on a thick veil, her quietest dress, and took the omnibus to Tower Hill.

She was too well acquainted with the world to go empty-handed and to make those trivial mistakes by which many well-meaning women reduce charity to the ludicrous. She had an old bag especially devoted to this secret vice, for one cannot carry half-pounds of butter, packets of tea, and pounds of raw sausages in one's best hand-bag.

The recipients of her charity were a race of men overlooked by Charity Organizations, ignored by those bland distributors of leaflet literature who call themselves the Sailor's Friend. Very few people find themselves by accident in the London Dock or the St. Katherine's Dock; in fact both these basins are rather difficult to find. Very few, therefore, know that there is such a being as the ship-keeper. There are many idlers by the riverside, on London Bridge, or the Custom House Quay, but in the docks there are none. These are places where only such as have business to transact are in the habit of resorting. This is easily explained by a note of the fact that all the docks are private property, and therefore closed to the general public.

The ship-keeper is a strange, amphibious creature. His calling is afloat, his business on the waters, and yet he is no sailor. In busier times



he rarely spent more than two months on board of one ship; now there are men living week after week, month after month, year after year on the same vessel. Many of them never set foot outside the dock-gates; some there are who remain afloat always. There are vessels lying out in the middle of the basins of which the decks have known no other tread for years than that of the aged hermit living in their forecastles. Most of these ships have a history, but others are merely waiting—waiting, if you please, for better times.

As if they could afford it; as if they could afford to wait for better times any more than the reader. For ships have but one life even as men, and if they are too slow, too clumsy, too heavy—well, they are failures, just as many are from the same cause. And a failure is a failure despite sophistry and in face of smooth phrases. We talk gravely or gaily of waiting for better times, but most are only waiting for an end of some sort.

Miss Winter had heard of these ships, and from different sources she gradually learnt that there were men living on board of them; men whose lives were almost as solitary as that of a sailor cast upon some desert island. It seems strange that within the roar of London life, almost within stone's throw of the crowded East End streets, there should be men living day after day without speaking a word to their fellow-creatures. For if they do not choose to come ashore, certainly

no one will trouble to go on board and see them. The butcher makes his daily round of the dock with barrow and knife like a cat's-meat man, but on twelve shillings a week one does not expect meat every day.

In course of time she evolved the idea of going to the docks to see if it was difficult to get on board these ships, and there she discovered that there was nothing easier. It was merely a matter of paying, as it is in every other part of the world.

At first her advances caused consternation, but woman-like she gradually made her way, never being guilty of one retrograde step. A few distrusted her motives, some thought she was merely a fool, others concluded she had "got religion." These latter were the first to welcome her. The explanation was so simple, and it had served to account for stranger conduct than this. They had, in their time, come across the malady in a more virulent form.

One and all appreciated the butter and the sausages. Some made use of the soap, and a few read the newspapers she brought them.

Soon Miss Winter found that her advent was looked for. The responsibilities of beneficence began to make themselves felt. She commenced to know personally these quaint old hermits, and found that there were sincere and insincere ship-keepers—ship-keepers who were interesting and others who were mere nonentities. On the whole

she gave preference to those who took the butter and the sausages and left the soap. These latter were old fellows who had never washed, and did not see the good of changing their habits in old age. This conservatism indicated a character worthy of admiration, and superior to that of such as asked for more soap and hinted at tracts.

She became more and more interested in this work, and lapsed into the habit of going to the docks once a week at least. As Claud Tyars frequented the same spot with an equal regularity, their meeting was only a question of time.

They had missed each other several times by the merest chance, but at last they came face to face in a most undeniable manner. The morning was rather foggy, and in consequence the dock was more silent and sleepier than usual. Miss Winter having just left a boat, was mounting the steep wet steps from the edge of the slimy water when a tall man, emerging from the fog, came to the top of the stairs and hailed the boat.

"Wait a minute," he said; "I want you."

He came down a step or two and stood to one side to let Miss Winter pass. In doing so he looked at her, and she, glancing up to thank him, gave a little start.

"Ah!" she exclaimed. "You—here—Mr. Tyars."

He raised his hat without betraying any surprise.

"Yes," he answered, "of course. The docks have a natural attraction for me—a sailor."

"I forgot," she said, looking calmly at him, "that you were a sailor."

She had been betrayed into surprise, but in a moment her usual alertness returned to her. She passed on, and he followed her.

"Are you alone?" he inquired.

"Oh yes," she replied, lightly. "I am quite at home here. I come nearly every week and interrupt the meditations of the ship-keepers. I look after their temporal welfare. It is quite my own idea, and I assure you that I have no connection with any philanthropic society."

"Tracts?" he inquired shortly.

"No; no tracts," she replied. "Sausages, butter, and soap—essentially of this world."

He was walking beside her, suiting his step to hers with an implied sense of protection, almost of approbation, which annoyed her.

"There may be," he suggested, half-ironically, "a hidden motive in the soap."

"But there is not," she replied, sharply. "I advocate cleanliness only. Personally I prefer the dirty ones."

"Probably," he said, "you do a great deal of good. These poor fellows lead a very lonely life. You must seem to them like a being from another world."

"So I am, Mr. Tyars," she said, still upholding her work. "Quite another world."

Then she suddenly laid aside her gravity with that strange inconsequence which is one of the many important differences between the male and female mind.

"You speak feelingly," she continued, in thinly-veiled mockery. "Perhaps you have been a ship-keeper yourself! You seem to have been a good many things."

"Yes," was his calm reply, "I have. I was once a ship-keeper in the Southern Atlantic."

She was silenced. The details of his terrible experience on board the fever-stricken merchantman had never been vouchsafed, but it was not difficult to imagine them from the official account he had been forced to publish.

Suddenly this cheerful little lady had realized the pettiness of her own existence, the futility of her own small caprice. She glanced up at him almost meditating an apology. Observant and analytical as she was, she had not yet noticed a fact of which Tyars was fully aware; she had not noticed that in her intercourse with Claud Tyars she invariably began in an antagonistic vein, and that with equal monotony this antagonism melted after a few moments.

In one respect Tyars was a commonplace man. He possessed the genius of command, which is the genius most often encountered in the world. It is merely a genius of adaptation, not of creation. Its chief characteristic is a close but unconscious observation of human nature. He

understood all who came in contact with him much better than any one of them understood him. Miss Winter was conscious of a reserve in this man's mind which was irrevocably closed to her. He casually glanced into her character in passing; if there was an inner motive beyond his fathom, he remained indifferent to its presence. When their paths crossed he was pleased to meet her, but she never flattered herself that he would go far out of his way to hear her opinion upon any subject. Had she been a young girl, this knowledge would have shown itself in a thousand little coquetries, or a petulant curiosity; but she had arrived at an age when it is frequently realized, even by the most beautiful, that Man has other interests in the world than Woman.

"If," she said, "I cared for horrors, I should ask you some day to tell me about . . . about those days—your ship-keeping days; but I hate horrors."

He laughed.

"I am glad," he said, with evident relief. "I hate horrors too, and should not make a picturesque story of it."

They walked on in silence, feeling rather more friendly toward each other every moment. It was necessary to pass beneath a crane of which the greasy chain hung loosely right across their path. Tyars stepped forward, and with a quick turn of the winch-handle drew the chain taut, and consequently out of her way. It was a mere

incident, trivial in its way; but women note these trivialities, and piece them together with a skill and sequence which men cannot rival or even imitate. Tyars' action showed an intimate knowledge with the smallest details of the calling he had chosen to follow. A landsman would have attempted to hold the chain back with hand or stick, running the risk of failing to do so, and incurring the certainty of covering himself with black oil. Tyars overcame the difficulty with seamanlike promptness, and although Miss Winter accorded to the action its full significance, she merely acknowledged the politeness that prompted it by a little nod.

"If," said Tyars, presently, "you were my sister, or if I were fortunate enough to possess a right to comment upon your actions, I should be strongly tempted to throw cold water upon your charity."

"Of course you would," she replied. "Nine men out of ten would do the same."

"I hope so."

"I am sure of it, Mr. Tyars; and, moreover, I do not defend myself. It is very difficult to find a channel for charitable motives to run in. At any rate, I do no harm to these old men."

"I have no doubt you do them a great deal of good," he said, rather bluntly; "but you are hardly the person to do it. This is not the place for a lady to wander about in alone. Wait twenty years."

She laughed, and stepped aside to hold out her arms in expostulation.

"I'm not a girl," she said; "and look at me. A thick veil and a clumsy old ulster without a waist to it. I think, indeed, it is foolish of me to ask you to look."

He did look, gravely, from the top of her simple hat to the toes of her small boots peeping out beneath the ulster.

"It is no use," he said; "you cannot disguise yourself. No woman," he added, "with your . . . advantages can."

He was quite right. Plainness is easier to conceal than beauty. There is nothing more difficult to hide than a pretty face and a graceful figure. They walked on again.

"If," she said, "we waited for men to tell us what we can do and what we cannot, a great deal of good would remain undone."

He would not argue; and his silence softened her humour, for it betrayed a determination to interfere no farther.

"It is not," she said, continuing her defence with woman-like persistence, "as if I dragged other people into it. I do not, for instance, bring Helen here."

As she said this she glanced up at him.

"No," he answered calmly, returning her gaze.

They were now at the dock-gates, and the constable on duty touched the brim of his helmet in double recognition.



"May I call a hansom?" inquired Tyars.

"Thank you," she replied. "There is one coming."

While waiting for the cab she spoke again.

"I feel," she said, lightly, "like a runaway schoolgirl. Will you please tell no tales out of school?"

"You can trust me, Miss Winter," he said, as he helped her into the cab, "to hold my tongue. It is one of the few accomplishments I possess."

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE LAST MEETING

THERE is no cloak for tears like laughter. He is a strong man who merely does nothing in the midst of tears. Most men either laugh or weep, but some there are who remain grave.

Matthew Mark Easton was not a strong man. The last meeting of the association he was pleased to call "Guy Fawkes" was looked forward to by him with positive dread. This was not the outcome of a great responsibility. He did not hold himself responsible for Pavloski and his three compatriots, for he knew well enough that he himself was but a means to the end. If these four Russians had not met with him, they would still have gone to Siberia; for they were branded, their souls were seared by the hot iron—the thrice-heated iron of unquenchable vengeance.

The truth was that the little American had a warm heart. He had learnt to like these men, to respect the curse of their nationality; for to him it was naught else than a curse. And, indeed, no man would willingly be a Russian.

This meeting was the beginning of the end. Many times had these six, and latterly seven, men met in the American's room. They were bound

together by the ties of a joint interest, by the riven bond of a common danger.

To-night they were to meet again; they were to partake once more of the open-handed transatlantic hospitality, and in all human probability the same seven men would never stand under one roof again. Of course such things happen every day. It was no good waxing sentimental. It is much better to take it cheerfully, as did Matthew Mark Easton. Provide oysters and champagne—especially champagne, it is a rare specific—and crack jokes. Only do not laugh at them too loud and too quickly, as if it does not matter much about the joke so long as the laugh is sonorous. But above all avoid any reference to the future, because in the loudest of laughter there are pauses—some jokes fall flat, and moments of thoughtfulness creep in.

Sergius Pavloski was the first to arrive. Immaculate, cold, and self-contained as usual; his old-fashioned dress clothes scrupulously brushed, his large amethyst shirt-studs brightly polished. There was a steady glitter in his eyes, but his manners were always suave and courtly.

"Ah, Smith!" cried Easton; "punctual as usual. We business men know its value, eh?—especially at meal-times. I've a new box of caviare, my boy. Found it in a German *delicatessen-handlung* in Wardour Street. The real thing, in a white china box; looks like saddle-paste."

He drew his guest to a little side-table, where liqueurs and a few delicacies were set out in the Russian fashion, and they gravely examined the caviare which had been purposely left in the small china box, bearing a printed label in Russian characters, as one sees it in the Newski Prospect shop-windows.

The interest which Pavloski displayed in this small waif from his own land was a trifle too eager to be quite natural. Easton made little jokes about the beneficial effect likely to accrue to his rusty Russian by the consumption of caviare, and they got through the bad quarter of an hour somehow, until the bell rang again. They were acting a part most obviously, and rather badly.

The little office in the city had been almost their home for the last two years, and within its four bare walls they had worked together steadily, and with that restrained enthusiasm which turns out good labour. The two heads bowed together over the little box of preserved fish had hatched and conceived a wondrous plot. They had talked of many things together; had counted lives as other men count their money.

Easton knew more of this man's history than any other human being. He alone knew that Sergius Pavloski was, of all the seven associates, by far the most dangerous man; that to him human life, whether his own or that of another, was not a sacred thing at all. And now the great scheme was maturing. The first decisive

move had been made. Pavloski was to leave England in twenty-four hours. The little office was closed; their joint labours were finished.

When the guests were assembled, Easton led the way to another room, where dinner was served. He had carried out his intention of offering to his guests the best that could be procured for money, and full justice was done to the fare provided. The usual silence upon the subject of their meeting was observed until the meal was over, and all chairs were drawn round the fire.

Then the informal proceedings commenced. Matthew Mark Easton was a trifle more restless than usual; his mobile features alternated between grave and gay, while his dancing eyes were never still. He fidgeted at times with his slim hands, and referred constantly to the lighted end of his cigarette.

"Gentlemen," he said, "we have done a vast deal of talking, and now at last some of us are going into action. Of course I have done the most talking, and now that the time for action has come, I occupy a retired seat in the background. That is the good God's dispensation, not mine. But I hope that the result of all my talking will be useful in the hereafter. Each one of you knows his part, and each one of you, of course, will do his best; I know that—at least I surmise so. The three gentlemen who leave us to-night for Siberia take absolutely nothing with them except a little money. There are no maps,

no letters, no instructions, nothing that an enemy can get hold of. We have, however, taken measures to supply them with money at various stages of the journey. We have also completed a method of communication, by means of which the safe progress of the travellers can from time to time be reported to St. Petersburg, and subsequently to the headquarters in London. But in case of partial failure—if, I mean, one of you should fail—it is quite understood that the others go on. Mr. Tyars undertakes to get his ship round Cape Chelyuskin, and to wait for you at the meeting-place arranged, namely, the westernmost mouth of the river Yana, not far from Oust Yansk, where we have a good friend. On the tenth of July he sails from thence to complete the Northeast passage, and reach the coast of Alaska. That date, gentlemen, is fixed. If no one comes to meet him he goes on alone, but he hopes to see you all three, and each with a party not exceeding fifteen persons."

The three men turned their dull eyes toward the two Englishmen seated side by side, and the American seeing the action paused. Unconsciously the seven men assembled had grouped themselves into order. The stout Russian and Easton were seated side by side with their backs to the table, and on their left were placed the three young Russians, while on the right the two British sailors sat side by side—a big man and a small one—the lesser and the greater power.

These men were now seated in a warm room, surrounded by comfort; when next they met, if they were destined ever to see each other again, it would be far within the Arctic circle. The three foreigners were virtually placing their lives and those of their friends in the hands of these two resolute navigators, and they did it with the impassive coldness which is such a curse to the Slavonic race. Each pair of eyes seemed to say, "I wonder if you will meet us there," but nothing more. The two sailors smiled in response. They belonged to a different race—a race that smiles but rarely laughs, that acts but rarely threatens, a race which (as may be learnt from history) has fought Nature more successfully than any other. And this was a fight with Nature. She is an enemy that is sometimes very careless, but on the other hand she knows no mercy. There were no protestations, no vows to do or die. It must be remembered that these conspirators belonged to the nineteenth century, a century much given to sliding, and little addicted to protestations of any description. The three Russians merely gazed with their expressionless eyes, and the Englishmen smiled in a characteristic way. Then Easton went on—

"Of course," he said, "the distances are enormous; but we have endeavoured to equalize them as much as possible. The meeting-point has been fixed with a view to this. It is the southernmost anchorage obtainable east of Cape

Chelyuskin, though it is far within the Arctic circle. Of course secrecy is the chief aim, and has been the chief aim we have kept in view all along. Each of you knows his own department, and that only. Each of you keeps to himself the meeting-place and the date, not even divulging them to the rescued exiles under your care. We have succeeded, I surmise, in keeping our scheme completely secret. No one knows of it except ourselves, not even the Nihilist party in London. We must remember that we are not Nihilists, but merely seven men engaged upon a private enterprise. We have friends who have been unjustly exiled, many of them without a trial—upon mere suspicion. We are attempting to rescue those friends, that is all."

"Yes," echoed the stout man, speaking for the first time, "that is all. I seek my daughter."

"And I my sister," said one.

"And I my brother," said another.

"It is," added Pavloski, slowly, "a wife with me."

Tyars and Grace said nothing. They had not quite thought it out, and were unprepared with a reason. Easton was more at ease now. He lighted a cigarette, and consulted a little note-book hitherto concealed in his waistcoat-pocket.

"I have endeavoured," he continued, without taking his eyes from the pocketbook, "to make every department independent as much as possible. For instance, my own death would in no



wise affect the expedition. The money and information would after such an event continue to filter through to Siberia by the prearranged channels. In case of the death or imprisonment of our agent in St. Petersburg the same communications would be kept open. We each have a substitute, and the arrangements are so simple that these substitutes will have no difficulty in carrying them out. I need scarcely tell you that heavy bribes have been sent to the right quarters in Siberia—high official quarters."

The stout man grunted in a knowing way, and signified by a little nod of the head that no further interruption need be feared.

"In Russia," continued Easton, turning the pages of his notebook, "we all know that every official has his price. The only difficulty lies in the discovery of that price. The only parts that have not been doubled are those of the three gentlemen who go out to Siberia to organize the escape of the prisoners and exiles. I surmise that it is unnecessary to point out that these parts cannot be doubled. There are not three other such men to be found. As to our ship, she was built for Arctic service, and has been thoroughly strengthened above and below under the personal supervision of Mr. Tyars and myself. In Mr. Tyars and Lieutenant Grace we have two sailors eminently calculated to bear the strain that will be put upon them. Humanly speaking they may be trusted to do all that man can do, to get the

*Argo* round Cape Chelyuskin to the rendezvous by the date named. It has always been understood between us that mutual trust and mutual assistance are things to be taken without saying. We all trust each other, and in case of failure, partial or entire, no blame is to be attached to any individual. This is our last meeting in London. Some of us may see each other again. I trust to God we shall. I trust that He who knows no nationalities will bring five of you together again next summer."

There was a pause. Matthew Mark Easton turned the pages of his notebook in a vague, aimless way. Then suddenly he rose, threw his cigarette into the fire, and turning to the table, drew forward the decanters. He poured himself out a glass of wine, which he drank, keeping his back toward his guests. Then in that same position, without looking round, he spoke in a low tone of voice —

"Gentlemen," he said, "my report is finished."

There followed upon this a silence. The Russians looked at each other vaguely. None of them were good English scholars, though they all understood the language perfectly, and spoke it without marked accent. Perhaps no one of them had anything very special to say. Just as the pause became embarrassing Tyars took the cigar from his mouth and spoke.

"I have thought it necessary," he said, "to give out the information that I am fitting up a

private Arctic expedition, of which the object is the exploration of the Northeastern passage. My reasons for doing this are numerous. It is difficult to fit up a ship in London without attracting the attention of maritime newspapers, and it is imperative that suspicion be averted from the first. I had the misfortune to get into the newspapers a few months ago, and a society journal, on the staff of which are two college contemporaries of my own, has taken the trouble to inquire publicly what I was doing on board a merchantman in the West Indies. A certain amount of publicity will insure the information reaching the Russian authorities that an expedition is to start in the spring, and our presence on the north coast will then cause no surprise or suspicion. Again, Arctic exploration is a matter of keen interest in England, and a few short paragraphs in the leading newspapers will not only give me the choice of the best men obtainable, but will lead to an influx of volunteered information and advice from whaling captains and former explorers."

There was a business-like terseness about the announcements of this man which, while in keeping with his calling (a calling which cannot afford to look on the shady side of things), seemed to volunteer the information that he, at all events, was not prepared to bear part in an affecting leave-taking. The result of this was that the party broke up with a mere shake of the

hand, and the last meeting of this strange conspiracy was a thing of the past.

These men had been from the first singularly careless respecting outward things. They totally ignored from first to last the picturesqueness of conspiracy, the romance of secrecy, the dramatic intensity of their situation. It is a painful duty to record that they lighted fresh cigars and drove away in hansom cabs.

## CHAPTER XV

### A SERMON

SOME days later Oswin Grace dined with Claud Tyars at his club. It was in this manner that he disposed of his unoccupied evening.

During the actual meal, served in a tall, hushed, and rather lonesome room, by a portentous gentleman in red plush breeches and pink stockings, there was not much opportunity for private conversation. A few friends of Tyars came at intervals and stopped to exchange some words before sitting down at their own particular table. There was about all these gentlemen a similar peculiarity, namely, a certain burliness of chest and flatness of back. They had one and all been boating men in their time. They did not boast of many honours, nor possessed many degrees among them, but most of them had been in the "Boat" in their time.

After dinner the two men lounged up the broad staircase to the smoking-room. There were two vast chairs near a secondary little fireplace at the far end of the room, and to these Tyars led the way.

There is nothing like a cigar, coupled with a club chair, to conduce to pleasant meditation.

Oswin was inclined to be merry, but Tyars made no attempt to conceal his preoccupation. He had naturally much to think of, and it had as yet not been noticed among his colleagues how strictly he kept matters in his own hands. About the ship and her crew, her outfit and her capabilities, he consulted his subordinate freely enough, but as Easton had once remarked, the executive was wholly in his own hands. He saw personally to every detail, made all purchases, gave all orders; and everything was done in a matter-of-fact and business-like manner which showed great powers of organization.

Although the two men were by now quite familiar friends, there were certain phases in Claud Tyars' character which were as unintelligible to Oswin Grace as they had been months before on board the *Martial*. The young lieutenant still confessed freely that Claud Tyars was a "rum fellow." One generally finds a statement of this description tantamount to an admission of inferiority. It is just possible that Tyars had chosen this young sailor to aid him in his enterprise on account of that same inferiority. Men who are born to command and love commanding are usually found in association with such as are obviously inferior to them. In some cases the selection is instinctive, in others it is deliberate; but Claud Tyars had unconsciously set his choice upon this man, knowing him to be a good sailor, a bold navigator, and an able officer. The choice

had been made very quickly, with that strange haste which almost amounts to impetuosity, and which usually characterizes the action of prominent and successful men. Tyars was not conscious of his own strength, and did not therefore choose Oswin Grace because he was of weak will and easily led.

The elder man was the first to break the silence. He removed the cigar from his lips and watched the fire burn while he spoke.

"You have not," he said, interrogatively, "got leave from the Admiralty yet?"

"Not yet," was the answer returned confidently. Grace evidently anticipated no difficulty.

"Then don't do it."

The little square-shouldered man sat up.

"What the devil do you mean, Tyars?"

"Don't you think that you had better stick to brass-buttons and slave-catching?"

For once there was a lack of conviction in his voice.

"No, I don't!" replied the other, with plenty of conviction. He was leaning back again in the deep chair; but his bronzed face wore a singular gray colour, while his gaze never swerved from his companion's features.

"What is it?" he continued in a quieter voice; "my seamanship?"

"No," replied Tyars, "that is a matter of history. It was your seamanship that brought the *Martial* home. Every one recognizes that."

"Then," said Grace, illogically, "let me go as A. B."

Tyars laughed.

"I do not think," he said, "that you ought to go at all. You must feel it yourself, and now is the time to draw back—before it is too late."

"My dear man—I don't feel it, and I don't want to draw back."

Grace was smiling now. Things were not so serious as they had at first appeared. He was still waiting for Tyars' reason. He knew that his whilom chief was not the man to change his mind without strong motives, and already he pictured himself relegated to a lower position on board the Arctic vessel.

"Why," he asked, "do you want to get rid of me?"

"I don't want to get rid of you. There is no man afloat whom I would put in your place. But I must be consistent. I have refused many good men for the same reason. You have too many—home ties."

Grace found time to relight his cigar, and the match illuminated rather a flushed face.

"What do you mean?" he asked at length, in a voice rendered unconscious with only partial success.

It was an awkward question, for Tyars had been assured by this man's sister that there existed a distinct understanding between him and Miss Winter.



He was not an adept at prevarication.

"You see," he said, awkwardly, "I am quite alone in the world. I have no one to sit at home and worry over my absence or my silence. I should like all the fellows who go with me to be in the same circumstances."

A somewhat prolonged silence followed—the stately silence of a clubroom, with padded doors and double windows. The two men smoked meditatively.

"I suppose," said Grace at length, "that Helen has been getting at you."

Tyars was to some extent prepared for this, but he moved rather uneasily in his luxurious chair.

"No," he answered, "you know your sister better than to think that. She is not that sort of woman."

Oswin Grace smiled. He was rather proud of his sister. She was, he opined, the sort of sister for a sailor to have. Not a fretting, high-strung girl, but cool and self-contained and strong. Tyars' words conveyed a compliment, manly and terse, such as a gentleman may permit himself to imply in the presence of a brother.

"Then," he said, cheerfully, "if Helen does not mind it is no one else's affair."

"How do you know," asked Tyars, "that she does not mind?"

"You have just said so."

"Never."

"Then what did you say, or mean to say?"

"I meant," replied the elder man, "that I never asked her whether she would mind or not, and therefore do not know."

"You merely told her that I was going."

Tyars nodded his head, and smoked with some enthusiasm.

"And—?"

"And she did not say in what way it would affect her; only suppose we are away two years—suppose we don't come back at all. Your father is an old man—she will be alone in the world."

Oswin Grace stroked his neatly-cropped beard thoughtfully.

"Helen," he said at length, "will marry."

Like most big men Tyars possessed the faculty of sitting very still. During the silence that followed this remark, he might have been hewn of solid stone, so motionless was he as to limbs, features, and even nerves. At length he moistened his lips and turned his slow gaze to meet that of his companion, who was sitting forward in his chair awaiting the effect of this argument. There was a waiter arranging the newspapers on a table near at hand, and before replying Tyars ordered coffee.

"Yes," he said, "that is probable, and she always has her friend—Miss Winter."

Oswin Grace leant back suddenly into the chair.

"Yes," he said, "she will always have Agnes Winter, and if she married, her friendship would be only the more useful."

That settled it. Claud Tyars gave a little sigh of relief, and helped himself to coffee.

"Shall I," he said, "put sugar in yours?"

"Yes, please."

"Two lumps?"

"Two small ones," replied Grace.

They discussed this question just as gravely as the other.

Then, when the waiter had withdrawn, Tyars returned to the original subject of the conversation.

"Of course," he said, "if you feel quite free from the slightest moral obligation, I have nothing more to say."

"Thank you," replied Oswin Grace, with relieved cheeriness; "that is exactly how I feel. But I wish you would not seek difficulties where there are none. You have me a beastly fright you know."

## CHAPTER XVI

### MISS WINTER DIVERGES

"MY DEAR OSWIN,

"If you want to carry out this theatre-party, come and see me about it. I shall be at home all the morning.

'Yours very truly,

"AGNES WINTER."

The young sailor read this letter among others at the breakfast-table. His father and sister were engaged on their own affairs; Helen with her letters, the admiral among his newspapers. Oswin Grace read the letter twice, and then with a glance to see that he was unobserved by his sister, he slipped it into his pocket together with the envelope that had contained it.

"Have you," said Helen, immediately afterward, "a letter from Agnes?"

"Yes," he replied, opening a second missive with airy indifference. "She wants me to arrange about the theatre. I shall go round and see her this morning—will you come with me?"

The girl raised her eyebrows almost imperceptibly. There had been a time when he would have schemed unscrupulously to go alone.

"I am afraid," she answered, quietly, "that I cannot go out this morning. I have so much to do in the house."

"You had better come."

"If you will put it off to this afternoon I should like to," she replied.

"No; I am engaged this afternoon."

"Where?" inquired the admiral without raising his eyes from the newspaper.

"At the docks—with Tyars."

There was nothing more said, and at eleven o'clock Oswin went out alone. The fog and gloom of late November had given place to a bright, dry cold, and this, without any great fall in the thermometer, now held complete sway.

Miss Winter's elderly maidservant evidently expected Lieutenant Grace, for she opened the door and stood back invitingly. Then when he was in the hall unbuttoning his thick pilot coat, she informed him that Miss Agnes was out, but was to return in a few moments. He was ushered up into the warm, luxurious drawing-room, and after the door had been closed, stood for a few moments irresolute in the middle of the deep carpet. Presently he began to wander about the room, taking things up and setting them down again. He inhaled the subtle atmosphere of feminine home refinement and looked curiously round him. There were a hundred little personalities, little inconsidered feminine trifles that are only found where a woman is

quite at home. The very arrangement of the room proved that it was a woman's room, that a woman lived her everyday life there, and set her indefinable subtle stamp upon everything. There was a silly little lace handkerchief, utterly useless and vain, lying upon a table beside a work-basket. He took it up, examined its texture critically, and then instinctively raised it to his face. He threw it down again with a peculiar twisted smile.

"Wonder what scent it is," he muttered. "I have never come across it—anywhere else."

He went toward the mantelpiece; upon it were two portraits—old photographs, somewhat faded. One of Helen, the other of himself. He examined his own likeness for some moments.

"Solemn little beggar," he said, for the photograph was of a little square-built midshipman with a long oval face. "Solemn little beggar. Wonder why he is on this mantelpiece?"

Then he continued his mental inventory, stopping finally on the hearth-rug with his back turned toward the fire, his hands thrust into his side-pockets of his short blue serge jacket.

"I think," he reflected aloud, "that I was rather a fool to come here. Tyars would not like it."

While he was still following out the train of thought suggested by this reflection the door opened and Miss Winter entered. She had evidently just come in, for she was still gloved and furred.

"Ah!" she said, gaily; "you have come. I was afraid that your exacting commander would require your services all the morning."

"My exacting commander," he answered, as he took her gloved hand in his, "has a peculiar way of doing everything himself and leaving his subordinates idle."

She was standing before him slowly unbuttoning her trim little sealskin jacket. Then she drew off her gloves and threw them down on a chair beside her jacket. There was about her movements that subtle sense of feminine luxury which is slightly bewildering to men unaccustomed to English home-life. The cold bright air had brought a glow of colour to her cheeks; she might easily have been a girl of twenty-one. But there was a fascination in her which was equal to that of youth, if not superior—the fascination of perfect self-possession, of perfect *savoir-faire*. She seemed singularly sure of herself, quite certain as to what she was going to say or do next. She seemed to know how to make the best of life, how to laugh in the right places, and work and play; and perhaps she knew how to love if she set her mind that way.

"The delicate daughter," she said, cheerily, "of the genial milkman has been suddenly taken worse. I knew that meant jelly, so I took it round at once with last week's *Graphic*, and got it over. I hope I have not kept you waiting?"

"Oh, no; thanks," he replied.

It almost seemed that he was not quite at ease with his old playmate—the companion of his childhood. If this was so the change was all on his side, for she persistently treated him with that sisterly familiarity which has led so many of us into mistakes that might be ludicrous if they only did not leave such a nasty sting behind them.

She approached the mirror above the mantelpiece, and in continuance of her sisterly treatment, proceeded placidly to draw out the long pins from her hat, while he watched the deft play of her fingers.

"I have been wandering round the room," he continued, resolutely turning away, "looking for old friends."

"You have scarcely been in this room," she said, without looking round, "since you came back."

"No-o-o! I found a little thimble in the top of your work-basket. Do you remember how we used to make indigestible little loaves of bread and cook them in a thimble over the gas?"

"Yes," she laughed, "it is the same thimble. It fits me still."

She held up for his edification a small dimpled hand with clever capable fingers bent backward. He gave a short laugh. Then, having removed her hat, she knelt down in front of the fire to warm herself.



"What," she said suddenly, "about this expedition?"

He looked back at her over his shoulder, for he had gone toward the window, and there was a sudden gleam of determination in his eyes. It was her influence that had disturbed Tyars' resolution.

"What expedition?" he asked, curtly, on his guard.

"This theatre expedition," she replied, sweetly.

"Oh, well; I suppose it will be carried through. We all want to go."

"We—all?" she said, inquiringly.

He came nearer to her, standing actually on the hearth-rug beside her and looking down.

"Helen," he explained, "and Tyars, and myself, and Easton, I believe."

She gave a little nod at the mention of each name, tallying them off in her mind.

"And," he continued, "I suppose you are not strongly opposed to it?"

"I," she laughed lightly; "of course I want to go. You know that I am always ready for amusement, profitless or otherwise—profitless preferred! Why do you look so grave, Oswin? Please don't—I hate solemnity. Do you know you have got horribly grave lately? It is . . ."

"It is what, Agnes?"

He was looking down at her with his keen, close-set gray eyes, and she met his glance for a moment only.

"Mr. Tyars," she answered, clasping her fingers together and bending them backward as if to restore the circulation after her cold walk.

"There is something," said Grace, after a little pause, during which Miss Winter had continued to rub her hands together, "that jars. Tyars annoys you in some way."

Miss Winter changed colour. She did not however make any answer.

"What is it?" asked Grace. "His energy?"

"No-o," slowly.

"His gravity?"

"No."

"His independence?"

"I like men to be energetic, grave, and independent. All men should be so."

"Then what is it?" asked Oswin.

She made no answer.

"Won't you tell me, Agnes?" he urged; and as he spoke he walked away from her and stood looking out of the window. They were thus at opposite sides of the room, back to back. She glanced over her shoulder, drew a deep breath, and then spoke with an odd little smile. One would almost have thought that she was going to tell a lie.

"His Arctic expeditions," she said, deliberately. "If he is going to spend his life in that sort of thing I would rather—not—cultivate—his friendship."

She leant forward, warming her hands fever-

ishly, breathing rapidly and unevenly. She felt him approach, for his footsteps were inaudible on the thick carpet, and she only crouched a little lower. At last, after a short silence, he spoke, and his voice was quite different; it was deeper and monotonous.

"Why should you not wish to cultivate his friendship under those circumstances?"

"Because," she answered, lamely, "I should hate to have a friend of mine—a real friend—running the risk of such a horrible death."

He walked away to the window again and stood there with his hands thrust into his jacket-pockets—a sturdy, square little man—a plucky, self-contained Englishman, taking his punishment without a word. He was, as has been stated, rather ignorant in the ways of women. Most naval men are. And he fell into the trap blindly. He was actually foolish enough to believe that Agnes Winter loved Claud Tyars, and he was ignorant enough to believe that a woman ever tells one man of her love for another. It seems almost incredible that he should do this. It is only men who make such mistakes as regards human nature.

As a man of honour he had carefully schooled himself to show this lady by every action, word, and gesture that if he had at one time been moved to regard her with other than the eyes of a brother, that time was passed. This was the least he could do in honour toward her, in faith

toward Claud Tyars. Whether he succeeded or not could only be known to Agnes Winter herself. But, to judge from the expression of his face, from the contracted pain of his eyes as he stood looking down into the quiet street, it would seem that he had not been prepared to hear from her own lips that this woman, whom he had loved all his life, loved another man. This nauseating sense of unsteadiness in a great purpose is probably not quite unknown to the majority of us. It is so easy to make up one's mind to a noble sacrifice and to give entire attention to the larger duties attending on it. Then comes some sudden unforeseen demand upon our self-suppression; sometimes it is almost trivial, and yet it leaves us shaken and uncertain.

Oswin remembered the jealous pangs with which he first saw these two together. Subsequent events had disarmed his jealousy and allayed his fears. Even now he could not realize what she had told him. And yet he was mad enough to believe it. Moreover, he continued to believe it. It was only at a subsequent period that he began to doubt and to analyze, and then it was clear enough to him. It was clear that in implying she had in no way committed herself. He had understood her to confess that she was on the verge of falling in love with this nineteenth-century knight-errant, and yet she had made no such confession. It is probable that in that later season he remembered the words and not the

manner of saying them. For, after all, the most important thing is not what we say, but how we say it.

Suddenly Oswin Grace seemed to recall himself to the matter-of-fact question under discussion.

"That," he said, "is the worst of making friends. One is bound to drift away from them. But still it is foolish to hold aloof on that account."

She laughed in rather a strained way.

"Our maritime philosopher," she said.

"Shall I get the tickets?" he asked in a practical way.

"Please."

"Well, then, I will go off at once and book them."

He shook hands and left her standing in the middle of the room.

"Perhaps," she murmured regretfully, "it was very cruel—or it may be only my own self-conceit. At all events it was not so cruel as they are to Helen. I do not think that they will *both* go now."

## CHAPTER XVII

### GREEK AND GREEK

SCARCELY had the front door closed behind Oswin Grace when the bell was rung again.

Miss Winter standing in the drawing-room heard the tones of a man's voice, and in a few moments the maid knocked and came into the drawing-room.

"A gentleman, please, Miss; a Mr. Easton," she said, doubtfully.

"Mr. Easton," repeated Agnes Winter, catching the inflection of doubt. For a moment she forgot who this might be.

"He gave his full name, Miss," added the servant with faltering gravity.

"Oh."

"Mr. Matthew Mark Easton."

"Of course—show him up at once."

Matthew Mark Easton had evidently devoted some care to the question of dress on this occasion. Some extra care perhaps, for he was a peculiarly neat man. He always wore a narrow silk tie in the form of a bow of which the ends were allowed to stick straight out sideways, over the waistcoat. His coat was embellished by an orchid.

"I am afraid," he began at once, with perfect

equanimity, "that I have made a mistake—a social blunder."

"How so?" inquired Miss Winter, smiling her ready smile.

"I do not think that your hired girl expected visitors at this time in the morning," he replied, waiting obviously for her to take a seat.

"I am afraid Ann is rather eccentric," began the lady, apologetically, but he stopped her with a laugh.

"Oh no!" he said, "she did not think that I had come about the gas-meter, or anything like that. But her face is expressive if homely; plain, I mean."

"I hope that it only expressed polite surprise."

"That was all," he replied, laying on the table a few beautiful flowers which he had been carrying loose in his hand. There were orchids and white lilac and pale heliotrope. "I brought you these," he explained, "but I did not come on purpose to bring them. I came on business, so to speak. I have noticed that when Englishmen are by way of being sociable, when they are going to a dance or a theatre or to make calls, they always carry a flower in their buttonhole, so I bought one. I thought it would explain to your domestic servant that I had come to call, but she perhaps failed to see my flower. When I ~~was~~ buying it, I saw these other ones and—and thought they would look nice in your parlour."

He looked round him in his formal American

way, and interrupted her thanks by saying that it was a very pretty room.

She rose, and taking up the delicate flowers proceeded at once to place them in water.

"I came," he then explained, "to inform you that I have secured a box, the stage-box, for Wednesday night, at the Epic Theatre. It will be doing me a pleasure if you will form one of my party."

Still engaged with the flowers, Miss Winter began thanking him vaguely without actually accepting.

"I do not know," he said, "exactly how these things are managed in England, but I want Miss Grace and her brother to come as my guests too. Miss Grace was kind enough to ask me to be one of a theatre party, and mentioned the Epic. so I went right away and got a box."

"Oswin has just gone to procure seats for the same night," said Miss Winter, quickly.

"No," replied the American; "I stopped him. I met him in the street."

Miss Winter knew that they must have met actually on her doorstep, and she wondered why he should have deliberately made a misstatement. She felt indefinitely guilty, as if Oswin's visit had been surreptitious. Suddenly she became aware of the quick flitting glance of her companion's eyes, noting everything—each tiny flicker of the eyelids, each indrawn breath, each slightest movement.



"How am I to do it?" he asked, innocently. "A note to Miss Grace, or a verbal invitation to her brother?"

"A note," replied Miss Winter, with a gravity equal to his own, "to Helen, saying that you have secured the stage-box for Wednesday evening, and hope that she and her brother will accept seats in it."

He nodded his head, signifying comprehension, and rose to go.

"Thank you," he said; "in America we would not be so circumlocutory. We would say, 'Dear Miss Grace, will you come to the theatre with self and friends on Wednesday?' But I am anxious to do what is right over here. I respect your British institutions and your domestic servants; the two hold together right through. Half the institutions are adhered to on account of the servants. Half your British gentlemen dress for dinner because their butler puts on a claw-hammer coat for the same. Half your ladies wash their hands for lunch because the hired girl has taken up a tin of hot water."

"And in America," said Miss Winter, who had not risen from her seat, "you have no respect for your servants?"

"Not much—we pretend we have. We pretend that we are all equal, and of course we are not. We think that we are very simple, and we are in reality very complex. Our social life is so complicated as to be almost impossible. No;

you are the simplest people on earth, because you like doing exactly what your immediate ancestors did. We are not content with a generation, we must go farther back for our model, or else we have no model at all, but try to be one."

"I think," said Miss Winter, "that you are more conscious of yourselves than we are. I do not mean self-conscious; it is not so strong as that. You are self-analytical."

"Yes," answered Easton, still lingering, although he did not take a seat in obedience to her evident wish. "We feel our own feelings; we think about our own thoughts; *nous nous écoutons* mentally."

"As a nation?" she inquired, with some interest.

"Yes, as a nation. We think, and talk, and write about our national morals, about the evolution of the national mind. You have nothing in common but your political wrangles."

"England," said Miss Winter, without disparagement, indeed with a sort of pride, "is the only country that does not talk of Progress, and write it with a capital P."

Matthew Mark Easton came back again toward the fireplace; like all Americans, he loved comparisons.

"Progress," he said, "spelt as you suggest is a disease. It fixed itself upon England in the days of your virgin queen; you have lived it down, and are all the stronger now for having

been affected. We got it next, and I surmise that we had it badly. France is suffering now, and she has had a still sharper attack, so sharp that surgery came into play—the knife—the knife they called the guillotine. Russia is the next upon the list; she will have it worst of all, her surgery will be effected with a dirty axe.”

“Your mention of Russia,” said Miss Winter, skipping away from the subject under discussion with all the inconsequence of her sex and kind, “reminds me of something I heard said of you the other evening. It was, in fact, said to me.”

“Then,” replied the American, with cheery gallantry, “I should like to hear it. Had it been said to any one else I allow that I should have been indifferent.”

He stood with his hands clasped behind his back, looking down at her with a smile upon his wistful little face.

“Do you know Mr. Santow?”

The smile vanished, and the dancing eyes at once assumed an expression of alert keenness, which was almost ludicrous in its contrast.

“The Russian *attaché*—unaccredited?” he replied, giving back question for question.

Miss Winter nodded her head.

“No—” he said, slowly; “I do not; I think I know him by sight.”

“I have met him on several occasions. I rather like him, although I cannot understand him. There is an inward Mr. Santow whom I have not

met yet; I only know a creature who smiles and behaves generally like a lamb."

"Santow," said Easton, deliberately, "is altogether too guileless."

Miss Winter countered sharply.

"I thought you did not know him?"

"I do not," answered Easton, imperturbably.

"Except by reputation?"

"Precisely."

"He is reputed," said Miss Winter, "to be a great diplomatist."

"So I believe—hence the lamb-like manners."

Easton's face was a study in the art of suppressing curiosity.

"Do you think that he is a wolf in lamb's clothing?" asked the lady with a laugh.

"No; I think he is an ass, if you will excuse a slight mixture of metaphor."

Miss Winter laughed again in a light-hearted, irresponsible way.

"I will tell you," she said, "what he said about you."

"Thank you."

"We were talking about Russia—it is his favourite topic—and he said that at times he felt like the envoy from some heathen country, so little is Russia known by us. By way of illustration he asked me to look round the room and tell him if it did not contain all that was most intellectual and learned in England. I admitted that he was right. He said, 'And yet there are but

two men in the room who speak Russian.' Then he pointed you out. 'That is one,' he said; 'he knows my country better than any man in England. If he were a diplomatist I should fear him!' 'What is he?' I asked, and he merely shrugged his shoulders in that guileless way to which you object."

Matthew Mark Easton did not appear to be much impressed. He moved from one foot to the other and took considerable interest in the pattern of the carpet.

"And," he inquired, "did he mention the name of the second accomplished person?"

"No."

"I wonder who it was?" said Easton.

"Mr. Tyars," suggested the lady, calmly.

"Possibly. By the way, I thought of asking him to join us on Wednesday at the Epic."

"I hope," said Miss Winter, with a gracious little bow, "that he will be able to come."

"Dear Miss Grace," began Easton, solemnly, as if repeating a lesson, "'I have secured the stage-box at the Epic for Wednesday evening next, and hope that you and your brother will do me the pleasure of accepting seats in it.' Will that do?"

"Very nicely."

"And I may count on you?"

"Yes; you may count on me."

"Thank you," he said, simply, and took his departure.

As he walked rapidly eastward toward the club where he was expecting to meet Tyars, his quaint little face was wrinkled up into a thousand interrogations.

"Yes," he said, at length, with a knowing nod, "it was a warning; that spry little lady smells a rat. How does she know that Tyars speaks Russian? He is not the sort of fellow to boast of his accomplishments. She must have heard it from Grace, and to hear from him she must have asked, because Grace is more than half inclined to be jealous of Tyars, and would take care not to remove the bushel from his light."

For some time he walked on whistling a tune softly. Cheerfulness is only a habit. He did not really feel cheerful, nor particularly inclined for music. Then he began reflecting in an undertone again.

"Here I am," he said, "in a terrible fright of two women; all my schemes may be upset by either of them, and I do not know which to fear most—that clever little lady with her sharp wits, or that girl's eyes. I almost think Miss Helen's eyes are the more dangerous; I am sure they would be if it was my affair—if it was me whom those quiet eyes followed about. But it is not; it is Tyars. Now I wonder—I wonder if he knows it?"

## CHAPTER XVIII

### EASTON'S BOX

It occasionally happens to the most astute of us to act, and even take some trouble over our action without quite knowing why we do so. There is a little motive called human impulse which at times upsets the deepest calculations. Not one of us has met a man or woman whose every action and every word was the result of forethought, and consequently fraught with a deeper meaning and a fuller design than would appear upon the surface. Such persons do exist, of course—because the lady novelist tells us so. There can be no doubt of it. I merely venture to observe that in our small way we have not met them yet in the flesh.

Had the keen-witted Easton been asked why he felt impelled to disburse ten guineas for the benefit of the lessee of the Epic Theatre he would scarcely have been able to make an immediate reply. In his rapid airy fashion he had picked up and pieced together certain little bits of evidence tending to prove that the young people with whom he found himself on somewhat sudden terms of intimacy were exceedingly partial to each other's society. As may have been

gathered from his own outspoken reflections, he had drawn certain conclusions respecting Helen Grace. He had never known women intimately, and to him as to many in the same position the feelings of a woman were something almost sacred. I must even ask you to believe that he held the quaint old-fashioned opinion that it is man's duty to spare women as much as possible—to make their way here among the rocks as smooth as they can—to be gallant and gentle—to be brave for them and to fear for them—to look upon them as a frail and delicate and beautiful treasure placed into their hands to cherish and to love; to be proud of.

Easton did the honours of his box with that easy formality of manner which is essentially American and admirable. He arranged the seats to suit the emergency of the moment or what he took to be the emergency of the moment. He placed Tyars just behind Helen Grace; for he was a soft-hearted man. Helen did not seem to notice this.

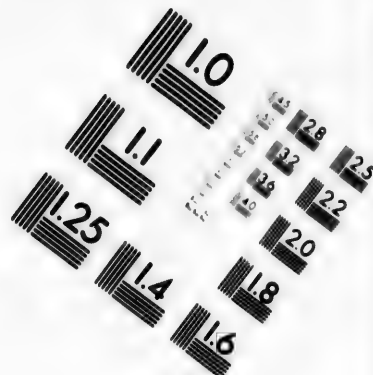
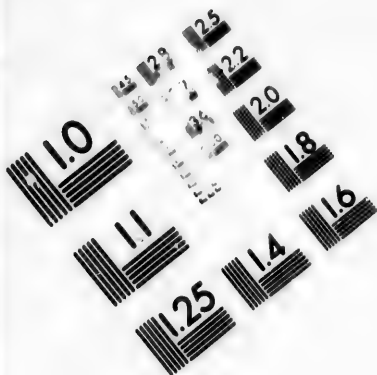
Tyars took up a programme and began studying it.

"Who is the man," he said, "playing the villain? I am frightfully ignorant in theatrical matters."

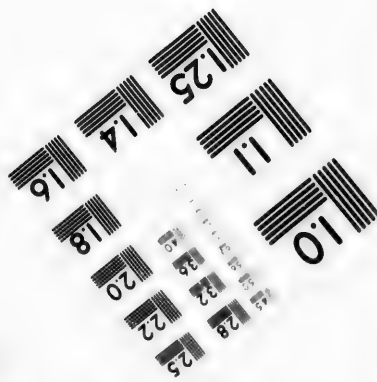
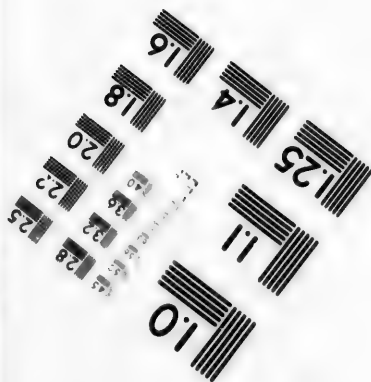
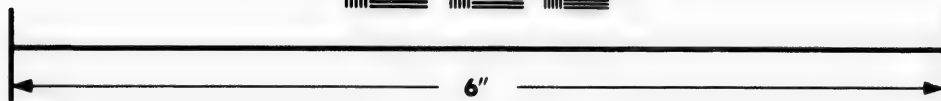
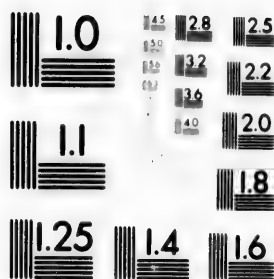
"He is good, is he not?" said the girl, mentioning the actor's name.

"Yes. He is unconscious of being a villain, which touch of nature makes him very human."





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Helen seemed to be rather struck with these words spoken indifferently with down-turned eyes.

"Are villains in real life unconscious of their villainy?" she asked at length, with perfunctory interest.

"I do not know," he answered, with a pre-occupation which saved his manner from being actually rude; "I should think so—yes—certainly."

He raised his head, and the effort with which he avoided looking toward her was probably detected by the gentle gray eyes.

There was a little silence: hardly irksome because the invisible orchestra was now in full blast.

"I suppose," said Helen, closing her fan, "that all this is rather trivial for you. The interest you take in it must be superficial now that you are so busy."

"Oh no!" Tyars hastened to begin; he was looking past her in that strangely persistent way into the theatre, and something he saw there made him turn his head quickly toward the stage.

"Hallo!" he exclaimed. Then he caught her wrist in his grasp. "Keep still," he whispered.

The painted curtain was bellying right forward like the mainsail of a barque, and from the space at either side a sudden volume of smoke poured forth in huge uneven clouds.

In a second the whole audience was on its feet,

and for a moment a sickening silence reigned—the breathless silence of supreme fear.

Then a single form appeared on the stage. It was that of the man referred to by Claud Tyars a moment before; he who played the villain's part so unconsciously. He was still in his dark wig and pallid make-up. On his arm he carried the coat he had just taken off, and the other arm clad in white shirt-sleeve was raised in a gesture of command.

"I must ask you," he cried, in a full clear voice, "to leave your seats as . . ."

And his tones were drowned, completely overwhelmed by a strange unearthly roar; the roar of a thousand human voices raised in one surging wail of despair, like the din of surf upon a shingle shore.

The man shouted, and his gestures were almost ludicrous even at that supreme moment, for no sound could be heard from his lips.

Then the gas was turned out, and in the darkness a terrible struggle began. Some who came out of it could liken it to nothing on earth, but they said that they had gained a clearer comprehension of what hell might be. Women shrieked and men forgot themselves—blaspheming aloud.

As the gas flickered and finally collapsed, those in the stage-box caught a momentary vision of wild distorted faces coming toward them. The pit had overflowed the stalls. Strong barriers crumbled like matchwood. Into a hundred minds

at once there had flashed the hope of escape through the stage-boxes.

"Grace! Easton!" It was Tyars' voice raised, and yet not shouting. The crisis had come, the danger was at hand, and Helen knew who it was that would take the lead.

She heard the two men answer.

"Keep the people back. I will break open the door on to the stage; it is our best chance."

The girl felt herself lifted from the ground and carried to the back of the box.

"Miss Grace!" said Tyars.

"Yes!"

"Are you all right?"

"Yes."

"I thought you had fainted, you were so quiet! Hold on to my coat! Never leave go of that!"

He turned away from her, and above the din and uproar came the sound of his blows upon the woodwork of the door. It seemed impossible that such strokes could have been dealt by an unarmed human hand.

Between the blows came the sickening sound of the struggle at the front of the box. Imprecations, blasphemy, and supplications, mingled with groans and the dull thud of merciless fists upon human faces. Shoulder to shoulder the two men—the American and the Englishman—fought for the lives of the women placed by the hand of God under their protection. It was a terrible task, though few women reached the

front of the box. Each man struck down, each assailant beaten back was doomed, and the defenders knew it. Once down, once underfoot, and it was a matter of moments.

Fresh assailants came crowding on, treading on the fallen and consequently obtaining an ever-increasing advantage as they rose on a level with the defenders. Neither seemed to question the wisdom of Tyars' command. It was a matter of life or death. Those already in the stage-box would only be crushed by the onrush of the others were they allowed to enter. With a dazed desperation the two men faced the frightful odds, hammering wildly with both fists. Their arms ached from sheer hard work, and they panted hoarsely. Their eyeballs throbbed with the effort to pierce unfathomable darkness. It was quite certain that their defence could not last long.

"Stick to it!" yelled Tyars. He might have been on the deck of the *Martial* during a white squall, so great was the uproar all round him.

At last there was the sound of breaking wood.

"Grace!" shouted the voice of Tyars.

"Yes."

"Look after Miss Winter when we go."

"Right."

"Easton!" he cried again.

"Yes!"

"Come last, and keep them back if you can."

Then a minute later he shouted, "Come!"

At the same instant the roaring crowd of madmen poured in over the low front of the box, like soldiers storming a bastion. The door which Tyars had succeeded in opening was so narrow as to admit of the passage of only one person at a time, but at this instant the larger door leading into a narrow passage, the real exit from the stage-box, broke down before a pressure from without, and from this point also a stream of half-demented beings tried to force an entrance.

The only advantage possessed by the original occupants of the box was that they knew the position of the small door.

The subsequent recollections of such individuals as survived were so fragmentary and vague that no connected story of the terrible tragedy in the stage-box of the Epic Theatre was ever given to the public.

Miss Winter remembered finding herself caught up in a strong pair of arms, which she presumed to be those of Oswin Grace. Almost at the same moment she and her protector were thrown to the ground. After that the next thing she could remember was the touch of a hand over her face and hair, and a whispered voice in her ear—

"Agnes Winter—is this you?"

She recognized the peculiar American twang which was never unpleasant. At that moment she almost laughed.

"Yes—yes," she answered.

"Then crawl to your left. Don't try to get up

—crawl over this man. I don't know who he is, but I surmise he is dead."

She obeyed, and found her way out of the narrow door and up some steps. Close behind her followed some one, whom she took to be Matthew Mark Easton, but it ultimately turned out to be Oswin Grace, who was in his turn followed by the American, but not until later.

Helen Grace heard the word "come," and submitted obediently to the supporting arm which half dragged, half carried her up some steps. She remembered being carried like a child, through some darksome place where the atmosphere was cold and damp. Then she was conscious of a halt, followed closely by the sound of breaking wood and the tearing of some material—probably canvas, for they were among the scenery. After that she probably fainted, and was only brought to consciousness by the shock of a violent fall in which her companion was undermost. Then she heard a voice calling out—

"This way, sir; this way."

She recollected seeing a fireman standing in a narrow passage waving a lantern. By the time that she reached the open air she was quite conscious.

"Let me walk," she said, "I am all right. Where is Agnes?"

"They are behind," answered Tyars. "She is all right. She has two men to look after her. You have only me."



"Wait for them," said the girl. "I will not go home without them."

"All right; we shall wait outside. Let us get out first."

They were standing in a small room, probably the office of the theatre, and a policeman stationed near the window, of which the framework had been broken away, called to them impatiently.

The window was about four feet from the ground, and Helen wondered momentarily why Claud Tyars accomplished the drop so clumsily. In the narrow street he turned to a police inspector, and pointed to the window.

"Lift the lady down," he said.

A cab was near at hand, and in it they waited—seated side by side in silence—for what seemed hours. The crowd dropped away, seeking some more interesting spot. At last there was a movement at the window, and Tyars got out of the cab and went away, leaving Helen in an agony of mute suspense. In a few moments it was over and the girl breathed freely.

It seemed strangely unreal and dream-like to hear Agnes Winter's voice again; to see her standing on the pavement beneath the yellow gas-lamp, drawing together the gay little opera-cloak round her shoulders.

As Miss Winter stepped into the cab she leant forward and kissed Helen. That was all; no word was said. But the two women sat hand-in-hand during the drive home.

Tyars and Oswin spoke together a few words in a lowered tone quite overwhelmed by the rattle of the cab, and then sat silently. The light of occasional lamps flashed in through the unwashed window, and showed that the men's clothes were covered with dirt and dust, which neither attempted to brush off.

When the cab stopped in Brook Street, Oswin got out first, and going up the steps opened the front door noiselessly with a latch-key. Tyars paid the cabman, and followed the ladies into the house.

The gas in the hall and dining-room had been lowered, and they all stood for a moment in the gloom round the daintily-dressed table. When Oswin Grace turned up the gas they looked at each other curiously.

The two men bore greater evidence to the terrible ordeal through which they had passed than the ladies. Oswin's coat-sleeve was nearly torn off, while his waistcoat hung open, all the buttons having been wrenched away. Upon his shirt-front there were deep red drops of blood slowly congealing, and the marks of dirty fingers right across the rumpled linen. His face was deeply scratched, and the blood had trickled down into his trim dark beard, unheeded, unquenched.

As to clothing, Claud Tyars was very much in the same condition, but there was a peculiarity worth noting in the expression of his face as he

looked round with a half-suppressed smile. All the lines of care were smoothed away from it. In his eyes there dwelt a clear glow of excitement (the deep inward excitement of a man accustomed to the exercise of an iron control over his own feelings), which had taken the place of a certain concentrated frown of preoccupation, as if something were going wrong.

There was something characteristic of their calling in the manner in which both men ignored completely the dilapidated condition of their apparel. That alone would have told a keen observer that they were sailors—men accustomed to foul weather and heavy damage—accustomed to accepting things as they come with a placid hope of fairer weather ahead when repairs might be effected.

Miss Winter kept her opera-cloak closed, simply stating that her dress was torn. Her hair was becomingly untidy, but she showed no sign of scratch or hurt.

Helen was hardly ruffled, beyond a few little stray curls, almost golden in colour, stealing down beside her ears. Her dress, however, was a little torn at one shoulder, and a tiny scratch was visible upon the white arm exposed to view. She doubtless owed her immunity from harm, and in all human probability the safety of her life, to the enormous bodily strength of Claud Tyars.

It was she who spoke first.

"Your arm!" she said, pointing to Tyars' right sleeve. "Have you hurt it?"

He looked down at the limb, which was hanging in a peculiar way very close to his body, with a vague and questioning smile, as if it were not his property.

"Yes," he said, "it is broken."

Miss Winter and Oswin went to his side at once. Helen alone remained standing at the table. She said no word, but continued looking at him with very bright eyes, her lips slightly parted, breathing deeply.

He avoided meeting her glance in the same awkward, embarrassed way which she had noticed before; answering the questions put to him with a reassuring smile.

"It happened," he said, "during the first rush. We fell down somewhere through some scenery, and my arm came underneath."

"You put it underneath," corrected Helen, almost coldly, "to save me, I suppose."

Her first feeling was unaccountably akin to anger.

"Instinct," he explained, tersely.

"Shall I fetch a doctor, or will you come with me?" asked the practical Oswin, gently forcing his friend into a chair. "We are surrounded by them in Brook Street."

"I will go with you," answered Tyars. "But first, I think, we had better see that the ladies have some wine."

With his left hand he reached a decanter, but Miss Winter took it from him.

"You must have some," she said, pouring it out.

"No, thanks," he replied; "I think not, on account of inflammation."

"He is better without it," added Oswin.

Miss Winter gave a little short laugh, very suggestive of annoyance.

"You men are so terribly practical," she said, with a bantering air which was half serious.

"An arm broken below the elbow is not so very serious," explained Tyars.

"Claud," added Oswin Grace, "is one of those great strong healthy people who heal like horses."

Nevertheless he kept close to his large friend, and glanced at times into the colourless face with those keen experienced gray eyes of his.

It was, as Tyars had said, nothing very serious—a simple fracture below the elbow and well above the wrist—but the consequences of it might be serious. Claud Tyars was not thinking of the numb, aching pain which had now spread right up his arm. It was only natural that the first thought should be for the great absorbing scheme which was filling his mind. In little more than two months he was to sail from London. In nine weeks he was to lead a picked body of men forth on an expedition of which the peril was patent to them all. He could not af-

ford to devote his few remaining days of preparation to his own health, to the mere recovery from the effects of an incident. There were a thousand details still to be cared for—details which none other but himself could grasp or cope with. For it is the man who reduces detail to a minimum in his own daily existence, and sees personally to that minimum, who finds time to do great things in life. If we hand details over to others—if we wish to be waited on hand and foot in order to find leisure for the larger items of the conglomerate detail called a career, we shall probably employ all our time in endeavouring to teach others to divine our wants.

There are men in the world who pack their own bags, and others who make the task over to some one else. Claud Tyars was of the former; he habitually did his own packing.

## CHAPTER XIX

### A LATE CALL

REFUSING all offers of hospitality made by Oswin and his sister, Claud Tyars went off with his friend to the doctor's, leaving the ladies comfortably installed in armchairs by the fire.

They protested that they could not possibly sleep, and that, as it was only twelve o'clock, they would await Oswin's return.

You will say, perhaps, that they were all a trifle too self-possessed and calm to be quite natural. What really took place is narrated above; and it is not the fault of the writer if these persons chose to lose a series of dramatic points, to ignore a number of thrilling situations, and to refrain from anything approaching heroics.

The truth of the matter is, that ladies and gentlemen of this latter end of the nineteenth century are difficult subjects to write about. They will not, like folks upon the stage, make facial contortions capable of record as showing inward emotions. They will not laugh fiendish laughs, nor sigh "heigho!" nor tear their hair, nor beat their bosoms as people did fifty years ago, if one may judge from fictional literature. They are so

persistently self-possessed that one cannot wring a dramatic situation out of them anyhow.

We live so quickly nowadays, pass through so many emotions in the day, that our feelings are apt to lose their individuality.

Claud Tyars merely said "Good-night," as he preceded Oswin Grace out of the room.

And the two ladies left there sat, each in her deep armchair, toasting her neatly-shod toes on the fender, and said never a word. They both stared into the fire with such a marked persistence, that one might almost have suspected them of fearing to meet each other's glance.

At last Helen moved. She had evidently just become aware of a black mark on the soft mauve material of her dress. With her gloved hand she attempted to brush it off, and as this had no effect began rubbing it with a tiny handkerchief. Then she raised her eyes. Miss Winter was watching her with a curious smile—a smile much more suggestive of pain than of pleasure.

Their eyes met, and for some moments both seemed on the verge of saying something, which was never said. Then suddenly Helen leant forward and covered her face with her two hands.

It is not pleasant to see a woman weep from whose eyes tears have never flowed since childhood to eyes kindling with a strange surprise through tears, as if they could not understand what was blinding and burning them. It is often hard to realize sorrow, and it is always hard to



accept it as one's own property. With some the power of assimilating sorrow is merely a matter of tears, with others it is a dryer process. Most people, however, and especially in this generation, weep but once or twice in their whole lives. Again, most do it in solitude, so that others are spared the sight. It seemed to come to Helen Grace without premonition as a harsh surprise—just as death will come to some. She had no time to fly to her own room—no chance of exercising over herself that command which she had learnt from living with men alone.

It is just possible that Miss Winter was not without experience in these same tears. One can never be quite sure of these very cheery women whom one meets everywhere. She made no attempts at consolation. She did not look toward her friend, and there was no outward sign even of sympathy, except that her eyes glistened in a peculiar way. She merely waited, and, moreover, she had not long to do so. Helen recovered herself as suddenly as she had given way, and rising from her chair, stood with her shoulder turned toward her friend, her two hands upon the mantelpiece, looking down into the fire. Her attitude, moral and physical, was reflective.

"I wonder," she said, "if every one got out of the theatre."

"Mr. Easton promised to come and tell us," answered Miss Winter.

"To-night?"

"Yes."

The girl raised her head and looked critically at her own reflection in the old-fashioned mirror above the fireplace. The trace of tears had almost vanished from her young eyes—it is only older countenances that bear the marks for long.

Before she moved again the sound of cab-wheels made itself audible in the street, and the vehicle was heard to stop at the door.

Miss Winter rose and went to let in the new-comer.

It was Matthew Mark Easton. He followed Miss Winter into the dining-room, walking lightly—an unnecessary precaution, for his step was like that of a child.

"I do not know," he was saying, "the etiquette observed in England on these points, but I could not resist coming along to see if you had arrived safely."

"Yes—thanks," replied Helen, to whom the latter part of the remark was addressed.

"No one hurt, I trust?" continued he.

"Yes," answered the girl gently; "Mr. Tyars is hurt—his arm is broken."

Easton's mobile lips closed together with a snap, betraying the fact that he had allowed himself the luxury of an expletive in his reprehensible American way. He turned aside, and walked backward and forward for a few minutes, like a man made restless by the receipt of very bad news.

He glanced at the face of each lady in turn, and concluded that Helen was more sympathetic than Miss Winter in this matter. In a moment he conceived the idea that Agnes Winter was by no means grieved that Tyars should have met with an accident.

He had never considered her a scheming woman, but his conception of her character was that she possessed very decided opinions of her own, and was quite capable of acting up to them against the strongest opposition. For some reason, then, she was decidedly opposed to the expedition about to be undertaken by Tyars and Oswin. He had always suspected opposition in that quarter, but it had hitherto been passive, as feminine opposition is often compelled to be. This deliberate refusal, however, to simulate a sympathy she did not feel was something more than passive.

"Not a compound fracture, I hope?" he said tersely, while turning these things over in his mind.

"He thinks not," answered Helen, reseating herself.

"Was he in pain?"

"I do not know," replied the girl, in a toneless, mechanical way, which brought the quick, monkey-like eyes down upon her like lightning.

It was the matter of a second only. Like a serpent's fang the man's keen eyes flashed toward her and away again. The nervous face

instantly assumed an expression as near stolidity as could be compassed by features each and all laden with an exceptional intelligence. Then he turned away, and took up a broken fan lying on the supper-table, opening it tenderly and critically.

But Miss Winter was as quick as he. She knew then that he had guessed. Whatever he might have suspected before, she had no doubt now that Matthew Mark Easton *knew* that Helen loved Claud Tyars.

"The worst of it," he broke out, with sudden airiness, "is that there was no fire at all. It was extinguished on the stage. The performance might have been continued."

"It only makes it more horrible," said Miss Winter; "for I suppose there—were some killed?"

"That is so," he answered. "They took forty-two corpses out of our box alone."

"I did not know," said Helen, after a painful pause, "that it was so bad as that."

Easton looked at her with his quaint little wistful smile.

"Yes," he said, with transatlantic deliberation, "it was very bad. We were fortunate. The Almighty has something else for us to do yet, I surmise."

"We ought to be very thankful," said the girl, simply.

"Ya—as; and no doubt we are. I am."

He gravely pulled down his waistcoat, and stood with his legs apart, looking down at his own diminutive boots.

The ladies noticed that he bore no signs of his recent experience. He had doubtless called in at his club to wash and tidy himself before appearing at Brook Street. His left hand was neatly bandaged with white linen.

"Grace," he inquired, "is not hurt, I hope?"

"No, I think not. His hands were scratched—like yours," answered Miss Winter.

"It comes," explained Easton, looking tenderly at his injured knuckles, "from hitting in the dark. I came in contact with some very hard things—possibly British skulls."

Presently Oswin Grace came in, opening the front door with his latch-key. He was greeted by an interrogatory "Well?" from Miss Winter.

"He is all right," he answered. "It was a simple fracture. Barker set it very nicely, and I sent him off to his club in a cab."

"Then," said Easton, holding out his hand to say good-bye, "I shall go and help him into bed—tuck him in, and sing a soft lullaby over his pillow. Good-night, Miss Winter. Good-night, Miss Grace."

Miss Winter slept at Brook Street that night, according to previous arrangement. She was soon left alone in her bedroom. Helen complained of sleepiness, and, contrary to her custom, did not return to brush her hair before her

friend's fire—a mysterious operation, entailing the loss of an hour's sleep, and accompanied by considerable conversation.

The elder lady did not appear to be suffering from drowsiness. Indeed, she was very wide awake. She threw herself upon the bed, all dressed, in an oddly girlish pose, and lay there thinking.

"If it had been any other man," she meditated aloud, "I should have said that he could not possibly go now; but with him one cannot tell. The arm would hardly stop him, though something—else—might. Poor Claud Tyars! the *naïveté* with which he displayed a perfect indifference as to *my* life was instructive."

## CHAPTER XX

### FROM AFAR

ONE morning, about a fortnight later, Matthew Mark Easton received a letter which caused him to leave his breakfast untasted and drive off in the first hansom-cab he could find to Tyars' club.

The waiter whose duty it was to look after the few resident members, informed the American, whom he knew well by sight, that Mr. Tyars was not downstairs yet.

"Well," replied Easton, "I guess I'll wait for him; in fact I am going to have breakfast with him—a boiled egg and two pieces of thin toast."

He was shown into the room occupied by Tyars, and proceeded to make himself exceedingly comfortable, in a large armchair, with the morning newspaper.

Tyars was not long in making his appearance. At his heels walked Muggins—the grave, the pink-eyed. Muggins was far too gentlemanly a dog to betray by sign or sound that he considered this visitor's behaviour a trifle too familiar.

"Good-morning—captain," said Easton, cheerily. "Well, Muggins—I trust I see you in the enjoyment of health."

The violent chuck under the chin with which

this hope was emphasized, received scant acknowledgment from a very stumpy tail. The truth was that Matthew Mark Easton was no great favourite with Muggins. He was not his sort. Muggins had never been a frivolous dog, and now that puppy-hood was past, he affected a solemnity of demeanour worthy of his position in life. He looked upon the American as a man lacking self-respect.

"I have news," said Easton at once, laying aside the newspaper; "news from old Smith—Pavloski Smith."

"Where from?" inquired Tyars, without enthusiasm.

"From Tomsk! It is most extraordinary how these fellows manage to elude the police. Here is old Pavloski—an escaped Siberian exile—a man they would give their boots to lay their hands on—goes back to Russia, smuggles himself across the German frontier, shows that solemn face of his unblushingly in Petersburg, and finally posts off to Tomsk with a lot of contraband luggage as a merchant. I thought I had a fair allowance of cheek, but these political fellows are far ahead of me. Their cheek and their calm assurance are simply unbounded!"

"The worst of it," said Tyars, turning over his letters with small interest, "is that the end is always the same. They all overdo it sooner or later."

"Yes," admitted the American, whose sensi-



tive face betrayed a passing discomfort; "but it is no good thinking of that now."

"Not a bit," acquiesced Tyars. "Only I shall be rather surprised if I meet those three men up there. It would be better luck than one could reasonably expect."

"If one of them gets through with his party, all concerned should be very well pleased with themselves," said Easton. "Now listen to what Pavloski says."

He unfolded a letter, which was apparently a commercial communication written on the ordinary mail paper of a merchant, and bearing the printed address of an office in Cronstadt.

On the first page was a terse advice, written in a delicate clerkly hand, of the receipt by Hull steamer of a certain number of casks containing American apples.

"This," said Easton, "is from our stout friend. He has received the block soups, and the Winchester cartridges."

He then opened the letter farther, and on the two inside pages displayed a closely written communication in a peculiar pink-tinted ink, which had evidently been brought to light by some process, for the paper was wrinkled and blistered.

"'I have,'" read the American, slowly, as if deciphering with difficulty, "'reached Tomsk without mishap, travelling with an ordinary civilian post-pass, which is very little slower at this

time of year, as there are plenty of horses. I have bought a strong sledge, wholly covered in—the usual sledge of a merchant of fine goods—and instead of sleeping in the stations, usually lie down on the top of my cases under the cover. I give as reason for this the information that I have many valuables—watches, rings, trinkets—and being a young merchant, cannot run the risk of theft to save my own personal comfort. I have travelled day and night, according to the supply of horses, but have always succeeded hitherto in communicating with those who are to follow me. One man on my list was not in the prison indicated—he is probably dead. I find great improvements. Our organization is more mechanical, and not so hysterical—this I attribute to the diminished number of female workers. All the articles with which your foresight provided me have been useful; but the great motor in Siberia is money. With the funds I have at my disposal I feel as powerful as the Czar. I can buy whom I like, and what I like. The watches will be very useful; I have sold two at a high price; but once beyond Irkutsk, I will sell or give one to the master of each important station, or to the starosta of each village. By this means those who follow me will know that they are on the right track. They cannot well stop at a station, or halt in a village, without being shown the watch, which will tell them that one of us is in front. I have enough watches to lay

a train from Irkutsk to the spot where I assemble my party. I met my two companions by appointment at the base of the Ivan Veliki tower in the Kremlin, and we spent half an hour in the cathedral together within a musket-shot of the Czar, and under the very nose of the cream of his police. Since then we have not met, but are each working forward by the prescribed route alone. I see great changes here—Russia is awakening—she is rubbing her eyes. God keep you all three!’”

Matthew Mark Easton indicated by a little jerk of the head that the letter was finished. Then after looking at it curiously for a moment, he folded it and put it away in his pocket.

“Old Smith,” he said, “is quite poetic at times.”

“Yes,” answered Tyars, pouring out his coffee, “but there is a keen business man behind the poetry.”

“One,” observed Easton in his terse way, “of the sharpest needles in Russia, and quite the sharpest in Siberia at the present moment.”

“He will need to be; though I think that the worst of his journey is over. The cream is, as he says, at Moscow. Once beyond Nijni he will find milk, then milk-and-water, and finally beyond Irkutsk the thinnest water. The official intellect in Siberia is not of a brilliant description. Pavloski can outwit every gendarme or Cossack commandant he meets, and once out of Irkutsk

they need not fear the law. They will only have Nature to compete with, and Nature always gives fair play. When they have assembled they will retreat north like an organized army before a rabble, for there are not enough Cossacks and gendarmes in Northern Siberia to form anything like an efficient corps of pursuit. They may follow, but I shall have the fugitives on board and away long before they reach the seaboard."

"How many are there in Yakutsk?"

"Two thousand altogether, soldiers and Cossacks. They have no means of transport and no commissariat corps. By the time that the news travels south to Yakutsk, that there is a body of supposed exiles to the north, our men will have gained such an advantage that pursuit would be absurd."

"It seems," replied Easton, "so very simple, that I wonder no one has tried it before."

At this moment the waiter entered the room with several hot dishes, but the two men went on discussing openly the question mooted. Club-waiters are the nearest approach to a human machine that modern civilization has yet produced.

"Simply because no one has had the money. I know several whaling captains who would be ready enough to try, provided they were paid! The worst danger was the chance of the three men being captured as soon as they entered Russia. They are now at their posts in Siberia. In

May they meet surreptitiously on the southern slope of the Verkoianiska, cross the mountains, and they are safe. The three leaders will then be together, and they will retreat north as arranged, scaring the Yamschicks into obedience, and taking all the post-deer and dogs with them, so that an immediate pursuit will be impossible. I think," added the organizer of this extraordinary plot, "that we shall succeed."

Easton was silent. His boiled egg had arrived, and his keen little face was screwed up into earnest inquiry as he gently broke the shell with a spoon. He was a strange mixture of the trivial and the great, this sharp-witted American; but he was intensely conscious of his own shallowness. He could touch great things, but he could not grasp them; he could give attention to trifles, but he could not allot to them just that modicum of thought which would suffice. In the position which he had occupied during the last two months, namely, the chief superintendent of trifles, he was excellent. But without the directing control of Claud Tyars he would probably have given all his attention to small things, neglecting or fearing to touch the great. He would have regarded the pence too closely, failing to make sure that the pounds were safe. There was no lack of courage, but a distinct want of power, and this deficiency became singularly apparent in intercourse with Claud Tyars.

## CHAPTER XXI

### TRAPPED

TYARS was too busy, he said, to pay calls at this time. So he contented himself with learning from Easton and Grace that the ladies were none the worse for their fright. One evening he received a note from Miss Winter asking him to call next day as she had found a situation for young Peters, the ship-keeper's son. Miss Winter asked him to call in the morning.

He accordingly despatched his labourious correspondence as quickly as a cramped left hand would allow. He was not dressed in the tar-stained old suit donned for dock-work.

He set off westward at a swinging pace, and deliberately walked into the trap set for him by Miss Winter. This was so simple, and it succeeded so smoothly, that the lady whose well-intentioned deceit it was stood almost breathless in her own bedroom, pressing her hand to her breast and wondering whether she should laugh or cry.

The maid answering his summons swung the door so wide open as to leave no doubt of his welcome and expectation. Miss Winter was in, would he step upstairs? This he did with rather

less agility than when he had possessed two arms to swing. He was shown into the drawing-room, and for a moment imagined himself alone. Then he was conscious of a sound of smooth dress material, and a lady rose from the music-stool, partially concealed by the piano placed cornerwise near the window. It was a gloomy morning, and she stood with her back toward the light, and her face consequently in the shadow. But Tyars saw at once that this was not Agnes Winter; indeed the sight brought a quick contraction of pain to eyes and lips. He knew only too well every curve and outline of head and form placed in silhouette against the lace curtains.

They knew that they had been both tricked, and the sudden knowledge of it seemed to sweep all social formula away, for they never greeted each other. Something in the girl's attitude (for he could not see her eyes) told the man then that he had not this thing to bear alone. His sorrow was hers; that which weighed upon his broad back almost crushed her slight shoulders beneath its weight. This great heavenly light, this opaque darkness, had crept into her heart as into his, against the defence of a stubborn will. It was so new to both, so utterly surprising, so completely unlooked for, that both alike were dazed. Since its advent, both had walked on with uncertain steps, staggering vaguely beneath a new and wholly bewildering responsibility; some-

thing that seemed to have no beginning and no end on earth; something that tugged at the heart and cast a great veil of indifference over all pleasures and all trivial occupations; something that brings our everyday life suddenly forward like a cunning stage-light cast from the wings, and builds up behind the daily round of toil and pleasure a vague shimmering perspective of which the dimmest distance is Heaven.

When a strong man gets a fever, the doctor shakes his head: when a strong heart has this pain it is pain indeed.

At last the girl moved. She came toward him, only a few paces, and then stopped. She had emerged from the shadow, and the whiteness of her face struck him like a blow.

"Agnes," she said, steadily, "has just gone upstairs."

He nodded his head in a sharp, comprehensive way.

"I did not expect to find you here," was his reply, less inconsequent than might at first appear.

She crossed the room, passing close by him, so that a breath of cool air reached him. Her intention was evidently to ring the bell, but her strength of purpose seemed to fail her at the last moment, and she stood undecided upon the hearth-rug with her back turned toward him.

"Had you known—?" she began.

"I think," he completed, "that I should not have come."



Her eyelids quivered for a second, and the faintest suggestion of a sad smile flickered across her lips. He did not know that he was making matters worse, making her burden doubly heavy. He did not know that this very strength of his was what she loved. He was very far from suspecting that she had foreseen his answer before she asked the strange question. He would have been intensely surprised to learn that, although her back was turned toward him, she saw his attitude, the quiescent strength of each limb as he stood upright, patient, and gentle, tearing out his heart and trampling it underfoot. He never saw the shadowy little smile, nor knew its pathetic meaning.

And so he kept his secret, he held his peace despite a gnawing temptation to speak. He allowed her to continue thinking, if so indeed she thought, that he was sacrificing her to his own ambition, as Miss Winter honestly believed. He never told her that he was compelled to carry out his perilous scheme because he was bound in honour. It was high-flown, unpractical, Quixotic.

That singular sense of familiarity seemed to have come to them again, as it had come once before. There was no explanation, and they yet understood each other well enough. It seemed as if they had known each other all their lives, almost as if they had met in some other life. She turned and looked across the room at him with drawn and weary eyes in which there was

yet a smile as if to tell him that she was strong, that he need not fear for her. And he met her gaze with that self-suppressing gravity. He had set bounds for himself, and beyond these he would not step an inch, not even for her. He would not tell her that he loved her. Here was a man who not only had principles, but actually acted up to them instead of seeking to make others do so. For we all have principles applicable to the conduct of our neighbours.

"Can you tell me," he said at length, "whether this is accidental or intentional?"

"This meeting?"

"Yes."

She shook her head.

"I cannot say," she answered, loyal to her friend. She knew that if it was intentional, Agnes Winter was not the woman to do such a thing wantonly.

He answered his own question.

"It must," he said, judicially, "have been intended. Of course with every good motive—but it was a little cruel."

"She did not know," pleaded the girl. "She did not understand. Perhaps we are not quite the same as other people."

"You are not," he answered, slowly; "there is no one like you."

It is probable that such words had been spoken to her before, for there are men who seek to raise themselves in the esteem of others by flattery,

and if she had passed through a few London seasons without meeting some samples, she must have been singularly lucky. But the words were spoken so simply and with so much straightforward honesty that the veriest prude could not have taken offence. She had apparently no thought of such a thing.

She glanced at him, and then her gaze fell on nothing more interesting than a somewhat ancient carpet. This was more or less appropriate, for in her eyes there was ancient history—the most ancient of all—older than any Egyptian record. Dreams!

Before either had spoken again, their opportunity of ever doing so was taken from them, for Miss Winter was heard approaching, singing as she came. She opened the door noisily, and came into the room, rather too slowly, considering the emphasis with which the handle had been turned.

"Ah!" she exclaimed, without surprise, "you have come. It is very good of you, for Oswin tells me you are very busy."

She looked at him very keenly, but never glanced in the direction of Helen, who was arranging some untidy music on the top of the piano.

"Yes," he answered, rather vaguely, "I have a good deal to do."

"It is," she hastened to say, in her most practical way, "about Tim—what is his name?"

"Peters?" suggested he.

"Peters—yes. You never forget anything."

"I do not forget very much," he admitted, in the same perfunctory way, but he looked over her head toward Helen, which made the quick-witted little woman of the world think that perhaps the remark was not intended for her information alone.

"A friend of mine," she continued, "a Mr. Mason, wants a boy on board his yacht, and I thought that Peters would do, if you are not taking him with you."

"No," quietly, "I am not taking him with me."

"Then I may send young Peters to see Mr. Mason?"

"Certainly. I am much obliged to you for troubling."

He was at his stiffest. She had seen from the threshold that her plot had failed, and it was just one of those plots which cannot afford to fail. Success would have made her a benefactor to both, but success had not come to her, and she recognized instantly the falseness of her position. She knew this man well enough to foresee that he would never forgive her; for, as he himself had said, he was not of those who forget. She knew that this little plot, which had been hatched in a minute, and executed in ten, would alter the friendship between herself and this man during the rest of their lives. And she had al-

ways liked him; from the first she had been drawn toward him insensibly. Perhaps this feeling unnerved her. It is just possible that something might have been said or done just then which would have altered everything. There are moments when our lives hang on a balance, and in such times we cannot do better than did Claud Tyars; we cannot do better than throw boldly in the weight of duty, which is the truest weight and measure placed in our mortal hands.

Agnes Winter was fully aware that between herself and Claud Tyars no explanation would take place. He was not the sort of man to listen to or offer explanations. She knew that he would never speak of this incident, and felt that her own courage would fail her to broach the subject.

There was nothing for it but to let him go. She had been actuated by the best motives. It was not her own happiness, but that of her dearest friend for which she had schemed. She had played a bold game, and now her hand—the losing hand—lay exposed. There was nothing to do but to accept defeat. She did it as pluckily as she could, shaking hands and smiling into his grave face as he left the room.

When he was gone the two women returned to their separate occupations. Helen opened a music-book, and arranged it upon the stand, as a preliminary to seating herself at the piano.

Miss Winter had some letters to write. She drew a little table toward the fire, and made a certain small fuss in opening inkstand and blotting-book; but she did not commence writing, and somehow or other Helen did not begin to play. She turned the pages, and seemed uncertain as to the selection of a piece.

At last the elder woman looked up—or, to be more correct, she raised her head, and looked into the bright fire, touching her lips reflectively with the feathers of a quill pen.

"He looks worn and tired," she said.

"Yes," answered the girl, softly, and in that little word there was a whole world.

## CHAPTER XXII

### EASTON TAKES COUNSEL

AT the risk of being accused of betraying the secrets of the sex, this opportunity is taken of recording an observation made respecting men. It is simply this, that they all turn sooner or later to some woman in their difficulties. And when a man has gone irretrievably to the dogs, his descent is explicable by the simple argument that he happened to turn to the wrong woman.

Matthew Mark Easton had hitherto got along fairly well without feminine interference, but this is in no manner detracted from his respect for feminine astuteness. This respect now urged him to brush his hat very carefully one afternoon, purchase a new flower for his buttonhole, and drive to Miss Winter's.

He found that lady at home and alone.

"I thought," he said, as he entered the room and placed his hat carefully on the piano, "that I should find you at home this afternoon. It is so English outside. Excuse my apparent solicitude for my hat. It is a new one. Left its predecessor at the Epic."

"The weather does not usually affect my movements," replied Miss Winter. "I am glad

you came this afternoon, because I am not often to be found at home at this time."

"Oh!" he answered, coolly, as he accepted the chair she indicated. "I should have gone on coming right along till I found you in."

Easton's way of making remarks of this description sometimes made an answer superfluous, and Miss Winter took it in this light now. She laughed and said nothing, obviously waiting for him to start some new subject.

He sat quietly and looked with perfect self-possession, not at the carpet or the ceiling, as is usual on such occasions, but at her. At last it was borne in upon him that he had not called for this purpose, pleasant as the exercise of it might be; so he spoke.

"Then," he said, conversationally, "you go out mostly in the afternoons?"

"Yes; I am out a great deal. I have calls to make and shops to look at, and I often have tea with Helen."

His little nod seemed to say, "Yes; I know of that friendship."

"And," he continued, with a vast display of the deepest interest, "I surmise that you go in a close carriage, so that the weather does not hinder you."

"No; I only have an open carriage, a Victoria."

"Ah!"

"It is a very convenient vehicle, so easy of access."



"Yes; so I should surmise."

"And it is light for the horse."

"Runs easily?" he inquired, almost eagerly.

"Yes, it runs easily."

Then they seemed to come to a full-stop again. She racked her brain for some subject of sufficient interest and not too far removed from the safe topic of weather.

It was a ludicrous position for two persons of their experience and *savoir-faire*. At last Miss Winter gave way to a sudden impulse without waiting to think to what end the beginning might lead.

"How is Mr. Tyars?" she asked.

"He is well," was the answer, "thank you. His arm is knitting nicely."

There was a little pause, then he added with a marked drawl (an Americanism to which he rarely gave way) —

"Ho—w is Miss Grace?"

Agnes Winter looked up sharply. They had got there already, and her loyalty to friend and sex was up in arms. And yet she had foreseen it surely all along. She had known from the moment of his entering the room that this point was destined to be reached.

Matthew Mark Easton met her gaze with a half smile. His own quick glance was alert and mobile. His look seemed to flit from her eyes to her lips and from her lips to her hands with a sparkling vitality impossible to follow. They seemed

to be taking mental measure each of the other in friendly antagonism, like two fencers with buttoned foils.

She gave a little short laugh, half pleased, half embarrassed, like the laugh of some fair masker when she finds herself forced to lay aside her mask.

"I wonder," she said, "how much you know!"

The strange, wrinkled face fell at once into an expression of gravity which rendered it somewhat wistful and almost ludicrous.

"Nothing—I guess!"

"How much you surmise . . ." she amended, unconsciously using a word toward which he had a decided penchant.

"Everything. My mind is in a fevered state of surmise."

He sat leaning forward with his arms resting on his dapper knees, with a keen, expectant look upon his nervous face. He was just a little suggestive of a monkey waiting to catch a nut.

The lady leant back in her chair meditating deeply. She was viewing her position, and perhaps remembering that her acquaintance with this man was but of three months' growth.

"Is there anything to be done?" she asked, after a lengthened pause.

"I counted," he answered, "that I would put that question to you."

She nodded her head gravely.

"I thought perhaps that as you had come to me, you wished me to help you in something."

He looked distressed, for her meaning was obvious.

"No—I came to you . . . because . . . well, because you seemed the right person to come to."

She shrugged her shoulders.

"That is a mistake."

"Why?" he asked.

"Don't you see that I can do nothing, that I am powerless?"

He shook his head before replying tersely—

"Can't say I do. I do not know how these things are done in England, but . . ."

She interrupted him with a short laugh in which there was a noticeable ring of annoyance.

"It is not a question of how they are done in England. There can only be one way of doing it all the world over."

"And who is to do it, Miss Winter?"

"You, Mr. Easton."

"And," he continued imperturbably, "what am I to do?"

"Well . . . I should go to Mr. Tyars and say: 'Claud Tyars, you cannot go on this expedition—you have no right to sacrifice the happiness of . . . of another to the gratification of your own personal ambition.'"

"I can't do that," he said, deliberately.

"Won't," she corrected.

"Can't," he persisted, politely.

"Why?"

"I can't tell you."

"Won't, again," she commented.

"I do not see," he argued, defending himself in anticipation, "that any one is to blame. It is an unforeseen accident; a misfortune."

"It is a great misfortune."

"And yet," he pleaded, looking at her in a curious way, "it could not have been foreseen. We are all of us liable to such misfortunes. I had no reason to suspect that Tyars was more liable than myself. It might have happened to me."

"Yes," she answered, more softly, without raising her eyes. "Yes, it might."

He had uttered the words in such a manner as to render the thought infinitely ludicrous. She thought that such a thing might happen to him. And yet somehow she failed to laugh. Perhaps there was an undercurrent of pathos in the thin pleasant voice, into which her thoughts had drifted.

"I cannot say," she continued, "that I foresaw it, for that was impossible. There was no time. But . . . I think I knew it the moment I saw them together, when Oswin brought him to dine at Brook Street. They had met before, some years ago, at Oxford, you know."

"Then," he said, in a relieved tone, "I surmise the matter is out of our hands."

"It never was in our hands, Mr. Easton," corrected the lady.

He looked wistfully uneasy, as if caught in the act of enunciating high treason.

"No," he said, meekly.

"Such matters are rarely in the hands of outsiders, and in those rare cases only to a very small extent."

"No—yes," he conceded with additional meekness.

In his airy way Matthew Mark Easton was a wise man. He held his peace and waited. In the expressive language of his native land, it may be said that he let the lady "have the floor." The question was one upon which he eagerly allowed his companion to have the first and longest say. He was rather awed by the proportions of it, treated generally, and by the intricacies of the individual illustration of which he formed an unwilling figure.

"I have done my best," she said, "to put a stop to this extremely foolish expedition. I notice you look surprised, Mr. Easton; that is hardly complimentary, for it would insinuate that my efforts were so puny as to have been overlooked entirely."

He denied this with an expressive gesture of the hand.

"Of course," she continued, "if men choose to risk their lives unnecessarily, I suppose there is no actual law to stop them. But they should

first look round in their own home circle, and see that their lives are entirely their own to risk. Foolhardiness, entailing anxiety for others, is little short of a crime. Men lose sight of this fact very often in their desire to convince the world of their courage and enterprise. Claud Tyars ought never to have gone to Brook Street."

"But how was he to know?"

"He knew," said the lady, deliberately, "that he loved Helen. He knew that he had loved her ever since he was a boy."

"But," argued Easton, "the fact of his loving her could scarcely be looked upon as a crime so long as he kept it to himself. Tyars is deep. I do not often know what he is driving at myself. He never asked Miss Grace to reciprocate his feelings."

Miss Winter laughed in derision.

"What have I done? I surmise I've made a joke," said Easton.

"Excuse me," she said. "But you obviously know so little about it. Do you actually imagine that Helen Grace does not know, and has not known all along, that Claud Tyars looks upon her as the only woman in the world, so far as he is concerned?"

"I have hitherto imagined that, Miss Winter."

"Then you have never been in love."

He looked at her with twinkling eyes, and

seemed to be on the point of saying something which, however, he never did, and she continued rather hurriedly —

“Let me warn you,” she said, “against a very common error. Men, and especially young men, are in the habit of believing that women evolve a love for them out of their own inner consciousness. They go about the world with a pleased sense of uncertainty as to the number of maidens who have fixed, hopelessly and unsought, their wayward affections upon them.”

Easton acknowledged the truth of this statement by a quick nod of the head.

“You may take it,” continued the lady, “as a rule almost without exception, that girls *never* give their love to a man unsought. The man may not speak of his love, but he betrays it, and the result is the same. A girl may admire a man, she may be ready to love him, but the only thing that can attract her love is his. I know I am right in this, Mr. Easton. It is the fashion to rant about the incomprehensibility of women, but we understand each other. If Mr. Tyars had been indifferent to Helen she would never . . .”

She stopped, arrested by a quick movement of his hand.

“Don’t!” he said, with that peculiar deliberation which is a transatlantic demonstration of shyness; “don’t say any more on that point. There are certain things which we men do not like discussing.”

She gave a little laugh, and changed colour like a girl.

"I admire your chivalry," she said.

"I did not know," he answered, simply, "that it was chivalry. If it is, Miss Grace has taught it to me. It is her due. She reminds me of an old picture I must have seen somewhere when I was a little chap. Such girls must have lived in England when we roamed in the backwoods. We have none like them in my country. Discuss Tyars as much as you like, but do not let us talk about Miss Grace."

"I believe," said the lady, "that you are half in love with her yourself."

"No," he answered, gravely, "I am not, because . . . well, no matter."

"I wish," Agnes Winter went on to add, in that peculiarly hurried way previously noticed, "that we knew what to do."

"I," he said, "can only tell you one thing, namely, that Claud Tyars will go on this expedition. Nothing will prevent that. Besides—he must go."

"Why?" pleaded the lady, using unscrupulously all her powers of fascination, all the persuasion of her eyes.

"I cannot tell you."

"You are as determined a man as Claud Tyars himself."

"I am, I reckon—in some things."

"Surely you can trust me, Mr. Easton."



He moved uneasily in his seat, and she, taking advantage of his hesitation, leant forward with her two hands held out in supplication; then he seemed to yield.

"Because," he said, in an even, emotionless voice, "Claud Tyars has bound himself to go, and I will not let him off his contract! It is my expedition."

He hardly expected her to believe it, knowing Tyars and himself as she did. But he was quite aware that he laid himself open to a blow on the sorest spot in his heart.

"Then why do you not go yourself, Mr. Easton?"

He winced under it all the same, though he made no attempt to justify himself. She had touched his pride, and there is no prouder man on earth than a high-bred American. He merely sat and endeavoured to keep his lips still, as Tyars would have managed to do. In a second Miss Winter saw the result of the taunt, and her generous heart was softened.

"I beg your pardon," she said; "I know there must be some good reason."

She waited in order to give him an opportunity of setting forth his good reason, but he refused to take it, and she never had the satisfaction of hearing it from his own lips.

At this moment the front-door bell gave a good old-fashioned peal in the basement, and Easton rose to his feet at once.

"I believe," he said, "that it would be inexpedient for me to be seen here by Miss Grace, or Oswin, or Tyars. They would know what we had been talking about."

Miss Winter saw the correctness of his judgment.

"Yes," she answered, "I expect it is Helen. Come into this second drawing-room. When you hear this door opened, go out of the other and downstairs. Good-bye. Come and see me again."

"I will," he said.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### THE ELEVENTH OF MARCH

EVEN the watched pot boils in time. There comes an end to all things. The painter finally lays aside his brush; the writer at last presses his blotting-paper over "Finis." The composer must some day dot in the last chord to his opera. And these men in reaching the close of their labour complete an era of their lives. The printer also sets up "Finis" in his type, but that action is no item in his existence. It is only the end of a creation that leaves its mark upon the heart;—it is only those who create who lose something when their work is done—who pass on in life with a sense of vacancy somewhere in their being. For that creation, whether it be picture, book, or opus, is part of the man; it has the scent and impress of his Soul, and from his Soul a portion of its virtue has gone out. And yet the completed work is always *there*—the creator is always conscious of its presence, of its companionship in the world—though it stand neglected on a shelf, or hang unseen in a picture-seller's back shop.

Men who have conceived and have finally brought to completion some great scheme are

partakers in this feeling. They too know the joy of creation—perhaps they taste the sweetness of success. It is to be hoped that they do, because success is their guiding-star; it is more necessary to them than to the artist, who finds joy in the act of producing alone.

Matthew Mark Easton did not claim for his scheme the magnitude of a lifelong dream. It had been conceived in idleness, and of leisure it was the fruit. But he had lived with it night and day for nearly three years, until he had fallen into the habit of thinking of little else. He had acquired that lamentable custom of looking on men and things from one point of view only—taking interest or feeling indifference in both only as possible factors. But he was unconscious of it all. Like most eloquent men he was ignorant of the distance that he might carry others by his words, and remain unmoved himself. He had carried Claud Tyars, who in turn had dragged him after, not by eloquence, but by the silent force of an absorbed will.

When Easton woke up on the eleventh morning of March he was conscious of a certain unsteadiness of purpose in minor matters. He failed to dress himself with the quick completeness which usually characterized his toilet. He meditated over his ablutions and dawdled with his razor. His hand was not only slow, but distinctly shaky, and he came very near to bloodshed. He stepped to the window and contem-

plated the heavens of a pearly green—such as goes by the name of blue sky in London—and this was a man who never displayed the slightest interest in barometrical matters.

This day, the eleventh of March, was fixed for the sailing of the *Argo* exploring vessel, and Easton's chief thought on the subject was a vague wonder as to what he would do with himself after she had gone. This little man rather prided himself upon the possession of a hard and impregnable nineteenth-century heart. He took a certain small pleasure in the reflection that he was as nearly independent as it is possible for any human being to be. Although he was naturally of a gregarious and sociable habit, he held in reserve the thought that the practice of sociability was with him merely a matter of expediency, and not of necessity as it is with some. He could drop all his acquaintances at a moment's notice and never feel the loss. In fact he had of late cherished the idea of going to San Francisco to await the arrival of the *Argo*. He at all events was sanguine of success.

And yet he was distinctly disturbed this morning of the eleventh of March—disturbed, that is to say, for a man devoid of human tie or sympathy. It is possible that he was surprised at himself, and perhaps annoyed, for he whistled persistently and somewhat aggressively while he dressed.

The *Argo* was to pass out of the tidal basin

into the river at one o'clock, and at half-past twelve Easton drove up to the dock-gates. He brought with him the last items of the ship's outfit in the shape of a pile of newspapers, and a bunch of hothouse roses for the cabin-table, for there was to be a luncheon-party on board while steaming down the river.

He found Admiral Grace strolling about the deck with Tyars, conversing in quite a friendly way, and endeavouring honestly to suppress his contempt for seamanship of so young a growth as that of his companion. The ladies were below, inspecting the ship under Oswin's guidance.

The little vessel lay snugly under the high stone quay, and presented the appearance of some quaint, old-fashioned little man-of-war, so spotless were her decks, so mathematically correct the coiling of every rope, so bright her brass-work. One could have guessed that her first officer had served under the white ensign.

A few idlers stood on the quay with that peaceful sense of contemplation which comes to men who pass their lives near water, and exchanged gruff monosyllables of approval at long and uncertain intervals; varying the same with an interchange of quids, and sociable expectoration.

Easton joined the two sailors after having dropped the roses and newspapers through the open cabin-skylight, and his presence was somewhat of a relief to both.

"She is," he said, addressing himself to the admiral with transatlantic courtesy, "a strange mixture of the man-of-war and the yacht—do you not find it so, sir?"

"She is," answered the old gentleman, guardedly, "one of the most complete vessels I have ever boarded—though her outward appearance is of course against her."

"One can detect," continued the American, looking round with a musing eye, "the influence of a naval officer."

The old gentleman softened visibly. He had been guilty of allowing it to be understood by several of his friends that his son Oswin was virtually in command of this vessel, while Claud Tyars was merely the leader of the expedition.

"Even to a landlubber like myself," said Easton glibly, "that influence is apparent."

At this moment the ladies appeared, escorted by Oswin Grace—Miss Winter first, with a searching little smile in her eyes. Easton saw that she was very much on the alert.

"I feel quite at home," she said to him, looking round her, "although there are so many changes."

"So do I; the more so because the changes have been made under my own directions."

They walked aft, leaving the rest of the party standing together. As they walked Oswin Grace watched them with a singular light in his clear gray eyes, singular because gray eyes rarely

glisten, they only darken at times. Miss Winter and her companion, in silence, watched the pier-head hand cast off the last hawser—the last link between the *Argo* and terra-firma. It happened that the rest of the party were doing the same in a mechanically interested way.

"Does she seem to you," asked Easton, suddenly, "like an unfortunate ship?"

The Gravesend pilot who was standing near to them shouted some instructions to the master of the tug in such stentorian tones that Miss Winter was compelled to wait a few moments until he had finished his observations.

As she answered, the paddles of the tug revolved with a splash; the tow-rope seethed out of the water, and the *Argo* moved perceptibly.

"No," she answered, "there is a reassuring air of—of something stronger than *savoir-faire* about the ship which I like."

"*Savoir-faire*," he suggested.

"Yes," she answered, with a comprehensive little nod; and they stood watching the tactics of the ship's crew and the dock-hands without understanding very much.

Oswin Grace had gone forward onto the diminutive old-fashioned fore-castle. Claud Tyars stood beside the pilot, while the whaling-captain was not far off. There was singularly little shouting. Tyars and Grace never opened their lips. Once Tyars made a little movement with his hand which was rotatory in its tendency. Grace an-



swered with a nod, and spoke quietly to a man beside him, who immediately set a small steam-winch to work. For some moments there was no sound except the convulsive grunts of the winch, and these were finally arrested by a motion of Tyars' hand.

Presently the vessel glided smoothly between the slimy gates out into the open river. The tow-line was cast off, and the *Argo's* engines started. The vessel swung slowly round on the greasy waters, pointing her blunt stubborn prow down the misty river. She settled to her work with a docile readiness, like a farmer's mare on the outward road.

"This is a new experience for you," said Easton, with the faint American tinge which came to his tongue in unguarded moments.

"Yes," Miss Winter answered, "I did not want to come."

"Ah!"—he looked up aloft where a boy was at work on a tiny yard-arm. She did not however continue, so he encouraged her. "Why did you not want to come?"

"I knew we should be horribly in the way. I am always conscious of being in the way on a ship that is not securely tied down all round—moored, I mean."

"I do not detect any signs of annoyance on the part of the—executive."

"No," admitted Miss Winter. "One would say that it had all been carefully rehearsed."

"Then what is the true reason?" he inquired, coolly—almost too coolly for a man of his temperament.

"I do not know. I am nervous. I dislike the dramatic . . ."

"The unrehearsed?" he suggested.

She gave a little laugh and turned away to look at a brown-sailed barge which was scudding across the river astern of them.

"Yes, the unrehearsed."

"But," he said, "there is no drama. We are a light-comedy company. We make little jokes and laugh at them enthusiastically. I surmise, at least, that we shall do so."

"I came on board," said Miss Winter, gravely, "with a broad smile which I expected to last me all day, but it appears to have faded."

He looked at her critically in his peculiar twinkling way, not unaltered however with concern.

"Yes," he admitted, "it has. You must polish it up for luncheon. I intend to be intensely funny, and I guess you will have to laugh."

"I suppose Mr. Tyars will be of no assistance."

"Not of the very smallest. He is not good at that sort of thing—deep people, I take it, never are; it is only shallow water that sparkles in a breeze."

"I am still of opinion that it is a pity we

came," said the lady, making a little movement to join the other group. Perhaps she was conscious of Oswin's occasional glances in her direction, but if she was there was nothing in her manner to betray it.

"I always was of that opinion," admitted the American, following her, "but I could not prevent it."

Then they joined Admiral Grace and Helen. Presently, and before any conversation had passed, Tyars and Oswin came up together. Helen was standing slightly apart, and the interest which she was still showing in everything, was not the strangeness of a landswoman to all things maritime; it was a newborn shyness which she could not have defined herself—a sudden fear of betraying too great an interest in any one man, or the handiwork of any one man.

Tyars approached her, and stood by her side with that grave attention which a preoccupied man accords to those women who command his respect. Then suddenly, in his abrupt way, he spoke.

"You will never see this ship again," he said.

She made a little movement with her head and throat, as if a sudden chill had caused her to shiver.

"What do you mean?"

"We are going to sell her out there—at San Francisco."

"Ah—yes," she murmured with evident relief.

The effort to talk of commonplace matters in a commonplace way was a trifle *en évidence* on both sides.

"Do you admire the ship?" he asked, looking steadily at her as one looks at one's partner when the game hangs on a balance. "What is your opinion of her?"

The girl made an effort.

"Oh," she replied with a smile, "of course I know nothing about it; but my first impression was surprise at her diminutiveness. She still seems to me absurdly small. I am woefully ignorant on nautical matters, and size appeals to me as safety."

"In this case size has little to do with safety. In fact, the smaller we are the stronger we shall be as long as we can carry all we wish. We have sent on our coal, you know, by another steamer."

"To wait for you?"

"To wait," he answered slowly. "To wait." Then he broke off suddenly as if checking himself; and they stood in silence watching two boats approach from the Dock Pier, one a low, green-painted wherry for the pilot, the other a larger boat with stained and faded red cushions. The scene—the torpid yellow river, the sordid town and low riverside warehouses—could scarce have been exceeded for pure unvarnished dismalness.

Already the steps were being lowered. In a

few moments the larger boat swung alongside, held by a rope made fast in the forecastle of the *Argo*. A general move was made toward the rail. Tyars passed out on to the gangway, where he stood waiting to hand the ladies into the boat. Helen was near to her brother; she turned to him and kissed him in silence. Then she went to the gangway. There was a little pause, and for a moment Helen and Tyars were left alone at the foot of the brass-bound steps.

"Good-bye," said Tyars.

There was a slight prolongation of the last syllable as if he had something else to say; but he never said it, although she gave him time.

"Good-bye," she answered at length, and she too seemed to have something to add which was never added.

Then she stepped lightly into the boat and took her place on the faded red cushions.

The *Argo* went to sea that night.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### A HORRIBLE TASK

THERE are many people who go through life without ever knowing what it is to fight a gale of wind. Dwellers in cities know indeed that the wild winds blow when they hear the hum of strained wires overhead, when the dust rises in whirls at every street corner, when the sanitary *employés* have difficulty in capturing small truant paper-bags that refuse to recognize their cart or power, and when it is really inconvenient to wear high hats and light-minded skirts.

Those who live at the edge of the sea will never admit that they know little about a gale of wind, when at equinoctial periods their windows require cleaning every day, when face and hair are sticky with salt rime, and there is a pleasant sharpness of taste on the lips. Their gale is a matter of staying indoors, of avoiding the seawall, and carefully closing all windows. The sea is yellow and disturbed; far away it is of a peculiar light green, like dead pea-pods, and from its bosom there arises a thin white veil of spray, and there is no perspective. Sky and water meet in a gray uncertainty a short way beyond the pier-head. Occasionally a dripping coaster, some

close-reefed brig mayhap, or a tiny schooner moves across the near horizon, making better weather of it than one would think.

Sailors of course have the monopoly of wind and weather. They alone are competent to judge whether it be a whole gale or half, or a mere capful of wind. It is their trade and calling to tussle with the elements.

All winds are cruel, but killing is not their mission. There is, however, a breath of heaven of which the sole message is death. It is a wind with no fine-sounding name, for it belongs to the North, where men endure things and have no thought of naming them. It blows for six months of the year, with here and there a breathing space wherein to gather fresh impetuosity. It veers from south-southwest to northwest-by-north, and it is born upon the gray ice-fields round the pole. For many hundred miles it raves across the frozen ocean, gathering deathly coldness at every league. On its shoulders it carries tons of snow, and then striking land it rages and tears, howls, moans, and screams across Northern Europe into far-frozen Asia. In passing it clothes all Russia in white and still has plenty to spare for bleak Siberia, Northern China, and Japan. It is a wind which must depopulate any land it passes over. As a matter of fact this is almost the case, although a few northern races manage to live on in such numbers as to save extermination, and that is all. More than a third

of them are partially or wholly blind. Their existence is a constant and unequal struggle against this same wind and its pitiless auxiliaries—snow and frost. The earth yields no increase here. A little sparse vegetation, sufficient only to nourish miserable reindeer and a few horses; a scattering of pine-trees, and that is all. Although no sanctifying Spirit can be said to walk upon the waters, the sea alone sustains life, for men, dogs, and reindeer eat fish, not dried but frozen, when they can get it.

It was across this country, and in face of this wind, that a party of men and women made their way in the late summer five years ago. By late summer one means the first fortnight in July in these high latitudes. These travellers were twenty-one in number, sixteen men and five women. One woman carried a baby—a gaol-bird—born in prison—unbaptized. It did not count, not even as half a person, to any one except its mother. Men and women were dressed alike in good fur clothing, baggy trousers tucked into felt boots, long blouse-like fur coats, and caps with ear-flaps tied down. Boots, trousers, coats, and even caps bore signs of damage by water. When Northern Siberia is not frozen up it is in a state of flood, and travelling, except by water, is almost impossible. These people had come many miles by this comparatively easy method at imminent risk, for they had travelled north on the bosom of the flood. Since then



they had literally burnt their vessels in order to cut off pursuit.

The men dragged light sledges, three to a sledge, and four resting. The women carried various more precious burdens, delicate instruments such as compasses and aneroids. Beneath the fur caps throbbed some singular brains, from under the draggled brims looked out some strange faces. There was a doctor among them, two army officers, a judge, and others who had not been allowed time to become anything, for they were exiled while students.

The whole party pressed forward in silence with tight-locked lips and half-closed eyes, for the rushing wind carried a fine blinding snow before it. Only one person spoke at times. It was the woman who carried the baby, and she interlarded her inconsequent remarks with snatches of song and bursts of peculiar cackling laughter. Suddenly she sat down on a boulder.

"I will sit here," she said, "in the warm sun."

The whole party stopped, and one of the women answered—

"Come, Anna," she said, "we cannot wait here." Still speaking she took her arm and urged her to rise.

"But," protested she who had been addressed as Anna, "where is the picnic to be?"

"The picnic, Anna Pavloska," said a small, squarely-built man, coming forward and speaking in a wonderfully deep and harmonious tone

of voice, "is to be held farther on. You must come at once."

"I think," she replied, gently, "that I will wait here for my husband. I expect him home from the office. He will bring the newspaper."

They were all grouped round the woman now except one man, and he stood apart with his back turned toward them. He had been dragging the foremost sledge, and the broad band of the trace was still across his shoulders. He had been leading the way, and seemed in some subtle manner to be recognized as chief and pioneer.

Again the woman who had first spoken persuaded; again the broad-shouldered man spoke in his commanding gentleness. It was, however, of no avail. Then after a few moments of painful hesitation, he left the group and went to where the leader stood alone.

"Pavloski," he said.

"Yes, doctor." He never turned his head, but stood, rigid and stern, looking straight before him, scowling with eyes from which the horror would now never fade, into the gray hopeless distance. No marble statue could reproduce the strong cold despair that breathed in every limb and feature.

"Something," said the doctor, "must be done. We are behind our time already."

"I suppose it is my duty to stay with you?" said Pavloski; "I cannot leave the party? I cannot stay behind?"

The little man made no answer. His silence was more eloquent than any words could have been. A dramatic painter could scarcely have found a sadder picture than these two friends who dared not to meet each other's eyes. And yet, in a moment, it was rendered infinitely sadder by the advent of a third person.

Swathed as she was in furs, it was difficult to distinguish that this was a woman at all, and yet to a close observer her movements, the manner in which she set her feet upon the ground, the suggestion of graceful curves in limb and form, betrayed that she was indeed a young girl. Her face confirmed it—gay blue eyes and a rosebud mouth, round cheeks delicately tinted despite the wild wind, and little wisps of golden hair straggling out beneath the ear-flaps, and gleaming against the dusky face.

"I," said this little woman, "will stay with her. Sergius, I will try and take her back. We will give ourselves up. It does not matter. Now that Hans is dead I have nothing to live for. I have no husband."

Poor little maiden, she had never had a husband; the fatherly Russian Government had seen to that! But she chose to call Hans Onetcheff her husband. This same Onetcheff had been administratively exiled by mistake, and being delicate had died, at the mines, of prison consumption.

The little doctor winced. He was not a Nihi-

list at all, and never had been; but in personal appearance he had resembled one. There was something horribly real in the words that came from the girl's lips. She shouted them, for the wind was so furious as to render conversation impossible; and in order to make herself heard, she raised her round cherub-like face with an odd childishness of manner. Sergius Pavloski shook his head and moved a step or two toward the group half hidden by a fine driving snow.

"No," he answered. "We arranged it before leaving London. There is only one thing to be done."

The doctor and the girl exchanged a look of horror, and hesitated to follow him.

"It was agreed," he continued, mechanically, "that the lives of all were never to be endangered for the sake of one. Tyars said that."

Slowly the two followed him. As they approached the group some of these stepped silently back, some walked away a few paces and stood apart with averted faces.

"Can you tell me," said the woman, looking up suddenly, and leaving the baby's face and throat fully exposed to the cruel wind, "whether I can find a lodging near here?"

She addressed Pavloski, who was standing in front of her. He made no answer, but presently turned away with a convulsive movement of lips and throat, as if he were swallowing something with an effort. Then he raised his voice, and

addressing his companions generally, he said with the assurance of a man placed in a position to exact obedience —

“Will you all go on? Keep the same direction, north-by-west according to the compass. I shall catch you up before evening.”

He stood quite still, like a man hewn out of stone—upright, emotionless, and quite determined—awaiting the fulfilment of his commands. All around him his companions waited. It almost seemed as if they expected the Almighty to interfere. Even to those who have tasted the bitterest cup that life has ever brewed, this seemed too cruel to be true—too horrid! And the wind blew all around them, tearing, raging on. Some of them staggered a little, but none made a movement to obey the command of their leader; each seemed to dread setting an example to the others.

At last one man had the courage to do it. It was he who had spoken to Pavloski, the man whom they called doctor. He went toward one of the sledges and proceeded to disentangle the traces thrown carelessly down when a halt had been called. The men stepped silently forward and drew the cords across their shoulders.

The women moved away first, stepping softly on the silent snow, and like phantoms vanishing in the mist and windy turmoil. The men followed, dragging their noiseless sledges. The doctor stayed behind for a moment. When the

others were out of earshot he went toward Pavloski and laid his mittened hand upon his arm.

"Sergius," he said with painful hesitation, "let me do it—I am a doctor—it will be easier."

Pavloski turned and looked at the speaker in a stupid, bewildered way, as if the language used were unknown to him. Then he smiled suddenly in a sickening way; it was like a cynical smile upon the face of the dead.

"Go!" he said, pointing to windward, where their companions had disappeared. "Go with them. Let each one of us do his duty. It will be a consolation whatever the end may be."

The doctor was bound in honour to obey this man in all and through all. He obeyed now, and left Sergius Pavloski alone with his mad wife and his helpless babe. As he moved away he heard the woman prattling of the sun, and the birds, and the flowers.

He turned his face resolutely northward and pressed forward into the icy wind; but a muffled gurgling shriek broke down his strong resolution. Without stopping, he glanced back over his shoulder with a gasp of horror. Sergius Pavloski was kneeling with his back to the north; but he was not kneeling on the snow, for the doctor saw two fur-clad arms waving convulsively, and between the soles of Pavloski's great snow-boots he caught sight of two other feet drawn up in agony.

"Good God," exclaimed the man aloud, "forgive him!"

And with bloodshot eyes and haggard lips he stumbled on, not heeding where he set his feet. He fell, and rose again, scarce knowing what he did. Despite the freezing wind, the perspiration ran down his face, blinding him. It froze, and hung in little icicles on his mustache and beard.

"Good God," he mumbled again, "forgive him!"

And in the agony of his mind his brain lost all power of concentration. His lips continued to frame those four words over and over and over again, until they became bereft of all meaning, and lapsed into a mere rhythmic refrain, keeping time with the swing of his sturdy legs.

## CHAPTER XXV

### ON THE NEVA

EASTON disappeared from London soon after the departure of the *Argo*. He was going home to America, he said. But he came back again to Europe, and in course of time he turned toward Russia again. One evening he arrived quietly at St. Petersburg. He arrived by train from Libau, and took a droschky to the Hôtel de France for which he paid seventy kopecks. His passport was in perfect order, although smeared most lamentably by the clerk of the Russian consulate who *viséd* it in London. This small American was an experienced and clever traveller, as most of his countrymen are, and was as much at home in St. Petersburg as he might have been in Boston or London. Moreover, he had been in St. Petersburg and in the Hôtel de France before. His nationality was also in those days fraught with a certain weight of favourable prejudice, for that was three years ago, before the Siberian question had attracted transatlantic attention.

Matthew Mark Easton therefore made himself quite at home in the Hôtel de France, and dined very comfortably at the *table d'hôte*, of which certain small eccentricities failed to surprise him.



He lighted his interprandial cigarette at the candle placed between each two guests for the purpose, and fell very naturally into Slavonic habits; but it is perhaps worth noticing that he somewhat carefully concealed his knowledge of the Russian language. This alone was proof of his intimacy with the internal economy of the White Empire; for old travellers there know that it is better to reserve one's Russian for a necessity, even if he have no other purpose than enjoyment in his wanderings. After dinner he retired to his room, not however without being forced to ward off several singularly leading questions put to him by a bland landlord. These questions were obviously of one and the same purpose; namely, to discover the reason of Easton's presence in Russia. Had he been there before? Did he admire the town? Was not the Newski Prospect unrivalled? Where was he going after he quitted the Northern capital? To all of these Matthew Mark Easton replied vaguely and almost densely, with a singularly strong American accent. He was not surprised to be awakened the next morning by the wildest carillon that ever pealed from cathedral spire, for he had heard the remarkable performance of St. Michael's bells before.

After breakfast he wandered forth, guide-book in hand, having refused the services of a polyglot individual who professed to be the brother-in-law of the hall-porter. The landlord himself

directed Easton to the Newski Prospect, which however was not considered interesting until the afternoon. Nevertheless he went that way, and finally found himself on the English quay. He crossed the Neva, still in the same tourist's gait, and lost himself among the smaller commercial streets of the Vasili Ostroff. Presently by the merest accident he found himself opposite a small warehouse bearing the name "L. Ogroff" in painted letters above the blind windows of what had once been a shop. He pushed open the curtained door, and addressing himself to a pleasant-looking girl who was seated at a counter adding up the columns of a ledger, he mentioned the name "Loris Ogroff."

"Yes," answered the girl in perfect English, "he is in. Who are you?"

"Matthew Mark Easton."

"Ah! Come in."

She pointed to a little swing-door in the counter, and did not offer to open it as a born and bred servitor would have done. Then she led the way into an inner room which was lined with shelves containing long wooden boxes like miniature coffins. There were upon the table some rolls of common cloth.

"Mr. Ogroff is apparently a tailor," hazarded Easton in a conversational way, seeing that the girl was pretty and pleasant-looking.

"Yes," she answered, with a short laugh; "a very cheap one."

She had not relinquished her hold of the door-handle, and stood in a graceful attitude looking at him with clear blue eyes, in which a great interest and a slight amusement were provokingly mingled. She evidently knew all about him, and her attitude physical and mental was notably devoid of that shyness or embarrassment which is considered correct and polite between young persons of opposite sexes who meet without introduction.

"He is upstairs in the cutting-out room," she continued, with a twinkle in her childish eyes. "I shall tell him."

Easton stood looking at the curtained door after she had closed it. Then he picked up a piece of rough cloth and examined its texture critically.

"I am half inclined," he reflected aloud, "to become a Nihilist. There are alleviations even in the lot of a tailor's assistant of the establishment Ogroff."

In a few moments the door opened again, and a stout man entered with a bow. He shook hands without speaking, and pointed to a chair. Round his thick neck he wore a yellow tape-measure with the two ends hanging down in front. Before speaking he took up some rolls of cloth that stood in the corner, and unfolding a portion of each he ranged them upon the table in front of Easton.

We last saw this man in Easton's rooms in London. His name was not mentioned then be-

cause there was not much in a name for him. It was not Ogroff then. He was not minutely described, because a written description is not always of great value. For instance, he was in London a dark grizzled man with a beard—in this shop in the Vasili Ostroff, St. Petersburg, he was a fair, hairless man.

"Well?" he said asthmatically at length.

"Not a word . . .!" replied Easton; "and you?"

The man shrugged his heavy shoulders.

"Not a word. I have written to you all that I heard. I wrote on the fifth of May; have you destroyed the letter?"

"Yes—burnt it."

"Well!" ejaculated the Russian, misusing the word. "I heard," he continued,— "never mind how—that they all got away, in good health, at the proper time—that is, in the early summer of the year before last. They were followed, but they destroyed all the horses and boats as they went, and the pursuit was necessarily given up."

"Since that," inquired Easton, "not a word?"

"Not a word."

"There has been no semi-official account of the matter in the newspapers?"

"No; it has been hushed up. The official report is (as far as I can learn) that certain exiles and prisoners escaped; that they were pursued by Cossacks, and that the chase was only given

up when their death by starvation was a moral certainty."

"And," said Easton, "are they struck out of the list?"

"Yes; they are struck out."

The fat man spoke in a gasping way, and his breathing was attended by a peculiar hollow sound. It was noticeable that he never paused to think before replying to any question, and never referred to notebook or written memorandum. All his information was on the surface ready for use, and all his memoranda were mental. One cannot search in a man's mind for incriminating evidence. He who at present passed under the name of Loris Ogroff was known among his colleagues as an eminently "safe" man.

"I am going to look for them," announced Easton, after a pause.

The Russian raised his flaxen eyebrows.

"Ah! I understood that you were condemned—by the doctors."

"No, not condemned; they merely said, 'If you go it will kill you.'"

"And still," said the Russian, calmly, "you go."

"Some one must," answered Easton with equal coolness. "You cannot—you are too fat!"

"No; I do not travel now as I used. Besides, I have other work. My hands are full, as well as my waistcoat."

"I am going by land," continued the American. "I leave Petersburg to-morrow morning." Ogroff rose from his chair.

"You must go now," he said. "You have been here long enough; we are watched, you know. Here in Petersburg we all watch each other. I will send you a fur-lined travelling cloak to-night to your hotel—the Hôtel de France, I suppose?"

"Yes; how do you know?"

"I get a copy of each day's passport-returns from a friend of mine in the police."

"But," protested Easton, "I do not want a fur cloak."

"Never matter; it will be useful—you can give it away. It is to allay suspicion."

"All right; send it."

The Russian held out a fat white hand.

"Good-bye, you brave American," he said.

"G'bye!" returned Easton with a laugh.

## CHAPTER XXVI

### THEY TRIED IT

"WELL, at all events we have tried it!" Ordinary words enough in all sooth, and words we must all make use of sooner or later. But all words are ordinary, and it is only the manner of speaking them, the circumstances in which they are spoken, and the person to hear, that lend a human interest to the tritest commonplaces.

These words were spoken by the mere remnant of a man to a solitary companion while both looked out—peered through the twilight—on death. He who spoke crouched in a singular way on the hard snow, supporting himself on one fur-clad arm. He could not stand, for he had but one leg. The other had been cut off just above the knee—a recent amputation undoubtedly, for the empty trouser-leg, rudely tied with rope, was stained a deep suggestive colour. His face was a horrid sight to look upon, for here and there in the pasty yellow flesh were deep indentations of half-healed sores, the result of frost-bite. One eye was quite closed by a swelling which deformed the features and drew them all up. He spoke in a mumbling way, as if his tongue were swollen or diseased, and the language was the most dramatic of all tongues—Russian.

His companion, a short, thick-set man, stood beside him; but he stood weakly, and the terribly sunken lines of his cheeks told a story only slightly less horrible than that depicted by the face and form of the cripple. Both faces alike bore that strange dry look which tells unerringly of starvation. All who were in Southern India at the time of the Madras famine know that look, and those who have never seen it before divine its meaning at once. It is unmistakable, like an earthquake.

Behind these two men lay a vast snow-clad country, rolling away in rounded gray curves into fathomless mist. On their left was a slight declivity, terminated by a broad flat valley, extending beyond sight in a due southerly direction. This was the river Yana. Within a few yards of the two men, at their backs, stood a rude, ill-shapen hut, built clumsily and ignorantly of snow. Its low doorway faced the north, and amidst the gloom of its interior there were discernible a number of heaps, apparently formed of old and tattered fur clothing. These were dead men; the women of Sergius Pavloski's party had not lived to see the Arctic Ocean. Amidst the dead the living had crouched and slept that dull, dreamless sleep that comes to human beings in extremely cold climates. In front of the two men extended that which had been their bourne, their hope, their one desire—the Arctic Ocean. There was no water visible, but as far as the eye



could penetrate a heaving, surging field of pack-ice. Low down in the far northern sky there hovered a yellow shimmer—the ice-blink.

It was the second of September, and in all probability the ice was gathering for the winter. Already it extended along the deserted shore, in a belt twenty miles deep, without a lead. And from the continuous sounds of groaning and grinding it was certain that more was pressing in, adding confusion to the frozen chaos. The man who stood gave a short heartrending laugh as he looked out over the frozen sea.

“Yes,” he said, “we have tried it.”

There was a pause, and then the cripple—Sergius Pavloski—spoke again.

“Of course,” he said, almost unintelligibly, “we have failed; but still our failure may teach others, and we have kept it secret. Those who want to know will never know. They will always be in uncertainty as to whether we have escaped and are living hidden in America, in Europe, perhaps in Russia. We shall be more terrible, doctor, dead than alive.”

“I hope so.”

“I, at all events, shall be, for you say that I could not live a week in a warm climate. This leg of mine is less painful to-day; perhaps it is healing.”

“No, Pavloski, I have told you a dozen times it is not healed, it is only frozen. It can never heal. The moment it thaws you will die.”

A sickly smile passed across his unsightly features, and there was silence for a time—the deathly expectant silence of the far North. They were both looking out across the ice. It was a habit they had acquired during the last two months. At length Pavloski raised his mittened hand and extended it outward true north, like the needle of a compass.

"I wonder," he mumbled, "if Tyars is out there."

The doctor shrugged his broad shoulders.

"I wonder," he said, "why you entrusted this to an Englishman."

It was an old subject thoroughly thrashed out; an old point of dissension. When men see death staring them in the face they are not conversational on general topics; they only discuss their chances of life.

"If I had had the whole world to choose from I should not have selected another man," said Pavloski; "but there was no choice in the matter."

"I suppose," said the doctor, with an ill-concealed sneer, "that he has turned back."

"I will swear by St. Paul that he has not done that!"

The words were not pleasant to hear from lips already stiffening in anticipation of death.

"Then where is he?"

"Dead!" was the answer. "If Claud Tyars had been alive he would have come. He is not here, therefore he is dead!—Ough!"

He stopped and fell back fainting with pain. In his excitement he had moved, and had allowed some of his weight to rest upon the raw stump of his leg. In a second the doctor was kneeling on the snow beside him, raising his head, touching his lips with snow. It was a poor restorative, but there was nothing else at hand. One cannot offer to a dying man even the tenderest piece of an old sealskin mitten.

Without waiting for consciousness to return he attempted to lift the cripple, intending to carry him within the little snow-hut, but the movement brought back Pavloski's failing senses, and he shook his head in token that he wished to be left where he lay.

"No," he said, after gasping twice for breath; "I would rather die out here."

The doctor's bare hand crept within the tattered sleeve toward the pulse. He said nothing. There was nothing to say.

"I do not want," continued Pavloski, brokenly, "to see their—faces. I—brought them here.—It is my fault."

He lay for some moments with his lips apart, his uninjured eye half closed, then he spoke again.

"I suppose—the good God—will know how to revenge all this.—If they, the Romanoffs—the Czar—had twenty lives, and we could take—them all—we might pay—the debt;—but they have—only one life—to take, that would be too

short—a punishment. God will know how to do it—will He not, doctor?"

"Yes," said the deep voice of the doctor, "God will know how to do it."

"Pray," said the dying man, "pray to Him to do it—well!"

Then his head fell back and he breathed regularly and softly. But this was not the end. Presently the blackened lips began to move, and he spoke in quite a different voice, so different as to startle his listener. It was soft and even, as if recounting a dream not long dispelled.

"It is not yet a year ago," he said. "There were seven of us, four Russians, two Englishmen, and an American. Four Russians, two Englishmen, and an American—what a strong combination! The Russians to go into action on land, the Englishmen on the sea, and the sharp-witted American to watch and plot and scheme. I remember the last time we met was at Easton's house; we eat and drank together. Two of us are dead, and I am nearly—dead. Tyars and Grace—where can they be? They are out there, doctor, in front of us—to the north. I—I shall go and . . . meet them."

The lips closed with a sudden snap, and the doctor leant eagerly forward. Sergius Pavloski was dead. Perhaps his babbled words were true. He said that he would go to meet them, and it is not for us to maintain that this was the mere wandering of a mind harassed by much af-

fliction, paralyzed by the cold touch of Death. It is not for us to assert that the departing soul is never vouchsafed a gleam of light, of that Light which is not seen on land or sea, to guide it upward to its rest. Perhaps indeed he had gone to meet them, to find these two Englishmen in whom his faith had never wavered.

Then the survivor rose to his feet. It had begun to snow gently and in large flakes—a snow that would cover the ground to the depth of twelve inches in half that number of hours. As it fell it gradually covered the dead man, even to his face and eyes, which were already cold.

Presently the doctor moved a little, and turning slowly round, scanned the near horizon. He could not see the pack-ice now, for the snow was blowing in from the north, wreathing and curling as it came. The wind had dropped a little, and so the ice was still, and its groan was heard no more. The silence was terrible—that silence that comes between two squalls at sea. Suddenly the snow ceased, and only a few feathery flakes floated aimlessly in the air. The atmosphere cleared and displayed to the man's dim vision a lifeless world of virgin white. Even the footsteps of his late companion and himself were half obliterated; the body of Sergius Pavloski was covered, and presented the appearance of a churchyard mound, for the snow had drifted heavily at the first rush of the squall.

Then the lone man moved toward the snow-

hut, and entered it on his hands and knees. He took no notice of the dead—one soon gets accustomed to them—but fumbled about among the baggage piled up in one corner.

While he worked he mumbled to himself. Probably he was only half conscious of his actions, as men are in extreme cold. It is very easy to sit in a warm room and reflect that we should never lose our heads in a snowstorm; that we should never be so weak-minded as to give way to that dazed drowsiness which comes from snow alone. Fatigues on land or sea have their characteristics, but in neither case is the brain affected as it is by a great fatigue borne on snow. Mountaineers know this, and the good brothers of St. Bernard; they know that the strongest man is forced to use his utmost strength of mind to keep serene and calm while battling on snow against a snowstorm; whereas an ordinary sailor-man, of no great courage, can face a gale almost unmoved.

But this man's bodily strength seemed to be almost unimpaired. He dragged the heavy sledges aside without any great effort. He had been, and was still, a man of exceptional strength—broadly built upon short legs, with a large square head. It was somewhat singular that he should be apparently far from death while his companions had succumbed to cold and starvation; but this undoubtedly lay in the fact that he was a doctor. His intimate knowledge of the human frame had

doubtless enabled him to take a greater care of himself than he could force upon his companions. He had, no doubt, been strong enough in purpose to endure a hunger which his dead comrades had satisfied by illegitimate means. This is no place to go into details, for these pages may come to the eyes of many who will be no wiser and no better for learning aught of death. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine that any of us are in any way benefited by a study of this subject from a fictional point of view. We meet it often enough in real life.

That strange law which we call Chance has one singular trick; it almost invariably sets the wrong man in the wrong place. This Russian doctor was an instance of the perverseness of Chance. He was not a Nihilist, though he had been mistaken for one, which, as far as he was concerned, came to the same thing. He was not made of that stuff out of which are fashioned lonely adventurers, solitary travellers, or self-sufficing Stoics. He was merely a garrulous, gregarious little fellow with a decided bodily tendency to stoutness, which tendency had not been fairly treated. He had never lived alone—had never thought of doing such a thing. What a man to place upon the edge of the frozen Arctic Ocean with no human life within a radius of three hundred miles, in the month of September! But that is precisely the man whom Chance would select to place there. Moreover she made that

selection—hence this record. From among those iron-hearted, desperate fugitives, she carefully chose the wrong man to be last survivor; for there is no such thing as the Survival of the Fittest, though we write it with the capitalest of letters. Chance sees to that.

And yet in a dull, stupid way he realized the responsibilities of his position. He dragged two of the sledges out of the hut, and with a hatchet broke them up. Then he took the two strongest pieces of each—the crossbars—and bound them securely together, thus forming a rough pole. This he erected on a little mound where the snow was thin, building it up with such debris as he could lay his hands upon. It stood up gauntly, almost the only object within sight that was not white. It was a mere pole, the thickness of a man's wrist, and yet it was probably visible ten miles off against its gleaming surroundings.

When this was completed there was nothing left for him to do. There was no record to be preserved—no record of the sufferings and of the great struggle. The earlier acts of the tragedy were lost, and no earthly lips left to tell of them. After all, what did it matter? The last act wiped them all out. When the game is played there is nothing to be gained by the recapitulation of its chances.

The lone man stood back and contemplated his rude erection. It was rough, but strong enough to last a year or two. Then he looked



at the remains of the light American sledges which he had just broken up.

Suddenly an idea came to him.

"It would be good," he mumbled, "to be warm once more . . . just once."

And he piled up the wood in a little heap. He crawled into the hut and presently returned bearing a good-sized tin bottle labelled "Spiritus." He poured the contents over the wood and struck a match. In a moment the blue flames leapt up and the wood crackled. He crouched down to the leeward side so close that his clothes were singed and gave forth a sharp acrid smell. He withdrew his mittens and held his bare scarred hands right into the flames.

"Ah," he muttered in a gurgling voice, "that is good!"

But it did not last long. The wood was light and very dry, and in five minutes there was nothing left but a few smouldering ashes.

The doctor rose to his feet and looked long and steadily out to the north over the broken ice. It is hard to give up hope, and few men are ever forced to do so. Then he looked round him as a man looks round a room before starting on a long journey to see that he has left nothing undone. He had lived in this spot for more than two months, and its bleak surroundings were very familiar to him. His eyes lingered over each white mound and hillock—not lovingly, for

it was horribly dismal, almost too dismal to be part of this world at all.

Strange to say his eyes finished their inspection by looking up to heaven. The great snow-clouds were rolling south, bearing in their huge rounded bosoms the white pall to cover a continent for many months to come. But this man seemed to be looking beyond the clouds, seeking to penetrate the dim ether. He was not looking at the sky, but into heaven. At last he gave a contemptuous little shrug of the shoulders, full of a terrible meaning. The next moment he sought for something in the inner pocket of his fur tunic. There was a gleam of dull rusted metal, and he raised his hand toward his open mouth. At the same instant a sharp report broke upon that echoless silence, and a little puff of white smoke was borne southward on the breeze.

## CHAPTER XXVII

### THREE YEARS AFTER

THERE are some women to whom even Time is merciful. It is an undeniable truth that those among our gentle companions through this pilgrimage who are fair to look upon may surely count upon some allowance from men both young and old. Charity may cover a multitude of sins—perhaps it does; but Beauty undoubtedly covers more. Not only have plain women to bear with a thousand minute slights from every pretty face they meet, but if they be observant they will realize soon enough that there is a special code of laws tacitly allowed to the owners of these pretty faces. They have no need to be scrupulous; it does not matter much that they be honest, so long as they are gracious, and fascinating, and kind at intervals. The necessity of working for their own livelihood is rarely forced upon them. Beauty in distress is proverbially sure of relief. But there is one enemy upon whom all charms are lost, to whose heart red lips, soft hands, and pleading eyes cannot reach. This enemy is Time. It is not only around dull eyes that he scores his mark; he touches rosy cheeks and pale alike; he sets his weight upon

straight shoulders as on crooked bones. But some there are to whom he is kind, and these are usually such as fear him not. Some folks are said to defy Time, but it is safer to meet him with a fearless smile, for he is not to be defied. He carries more in his hands than we can tell or dare defy. Agnes Winter was not the woman to make this mistake, and Time had dealt very leniently with her. At the beginning of life, or at its end, three years are an important period, but in the middle of existence their weight is less perceptible. They seemed to have passed very lightly over the small phase of existence working itself out unheeded by the world in the drawing-room where we last saw Agnes Winter, and where we now find her again.

The room was unchanged, and the Agnes Winter dwelling therein was the same woman except in one very small matter. She had always been distinguished by a cheery repose of manner which was not without its sense of comfort for those around her; by its presence she had acquired the reputation of being very capable and singularly tactful—the sort of woman, in a word, whom a clever hostess would be glad to secure at her table. This characteristic had given place to a certain restlessness—a well-concealed restlessness; but still it was there. The smile with which she now faced that grim antagonist Time was not quite so confident as of yore. Her being subtly suggested one who, having been

burnt, respects the fire. Perhaps this change was more noticeable in the lady's eyes than in her person. The same strong, finished grace attended her movements, but her eyes lacked repose. They were the eyes of one who has waited and waited in vain. There is a good deal of waiting to be done here below, and most of it is vain. None need search very far afield to find such eyes as now looked up nervously toward the door at the sound of the large old-fashioned bell, pealing in the basement.

"Who is that?" said Agnes Winter to herself. "Who can that be?"

She rose and set one or two things in order about the room, and after glancing at the clock, stood motionless with her tired eyes fixed on the door, listening intently. The bell was by no means a silent member of its fraternity, and there was nothing unusual in its peal, although the early hour precluded the possibility of visitors. Miss Winter had therefore no special reason for uneasiness, but people who are waiting have at times strange forebodings. While she stood there the door was opened, and the maid announced —

"Mr. Easton."

Matthew Mark Easton came into the room immediately afterward. He shook hands rather awkwardly, as one sees a man go through the ceremony whose fingers are injured.

"How do you do, Miss Winter?" he said,

gravely, managing to spread out that salutation into such length that the door was perforce closed before he had finished.

"Well," she said, in a sharp, unsteady voice, ignoring his question; "what news have you?"

As he laid aside his hat he looked round almost furtively.

"I have no news of the ship, Miss Winter," he replied.

She begged him by a courteous gesture of the hand to take a chair, and seated herself beside the table where her work and books lay idle.

"Tell me," she said, "what you have done."

He came forward in obedience to her wish, and in doing so emerged from the darker side of the room into the full light of the autumn sun. In doing this he unconsciously called attention to his own personal appearance. The last three years had left a twofold mark on him. In face he was an older man, for there were a hundred minute crow's-feet round his eyes; and his thin cheeks, formerly sallow, now brown and healthy, were drawn into minute downward-tending lines; added to this was a distinct droop at the corners of the mouth which had always been so ready to smile. The meaning of it all was starvation, or at the best a lamentable insufficiency of nutriment at some past period. In his form and carriage there was a noticeable improvement, for it is a remarkable thing that the eyes and face bear far longer the marks and results of starva-

tion than the body that was starved. The American was obviously a stronger man than when Miss Winter had last seen him; his chest was broader, his step firmer, and his glance clearer.

"I have," he said, "explored every yard of the coast from the North Cape to the Yana river."

"And why did you stop at the Yana river?" asked the lady, with an air of knowing her ground.

"I will tell you afterward," he said; "when Miss Grace is with you—if—if she does not object to my presence."

Miss Winter thought for a moment.

"No," she answered, without meeting her companion's glance; "she will like to see you, I think. I will send a note round to her at once."

She drew writing materials toward her and wrote—"Mr. Easton is here; come at once." She read it aloud, and ringing the bell, despatched the note.

"I presume," said Easton, slowly, "that the admiral is still with us."

"Yes, he is alive and well."

Easton made no comment. His manner was characterized by that singular repose which has no rest in it. He looked round him, noting little matters with a certain accuracy of observation as people do when they stand on the brink of a catastrophe. The lightness of touch which had previously characterized his social method

seemed now to have left him. This was not a grave man, but a light-hearted man rendered grave by the force of circumstances. The two are quite apart. The presence of one in a room is conducive to restfulness; the other is a disturbing element, however quiet his demeanour may be.

Miss Winter in her keener feminine sensibility was conscious of this tension, and it affected her, urging her to speak at the cost of sense or sequence.

"Helen," she said, "is . . . you will find her a little changed."

He made a convulsive little movement of his thin lips, and gasped as if swallowing something.

"Ah!" he uttered, anxiously.

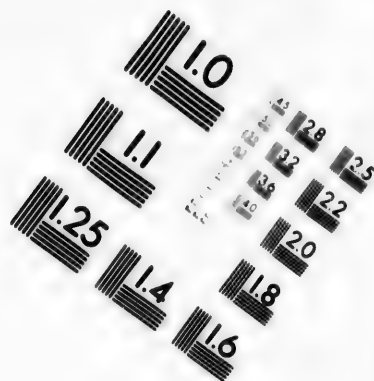
"Yes; she used to take life gravely, and now . . ."

"And now, Miss Winter?"

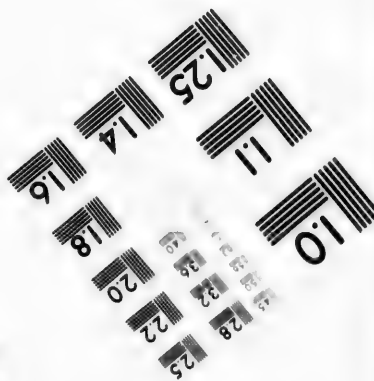
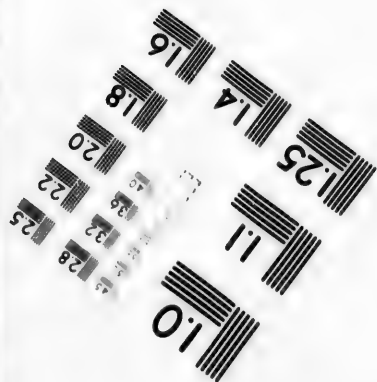
"She is altered in that respect—you will see."

He raised his eyes to her face. His glance was as quick as ever, but his eyes did not twinkle now; they were grave, and the rapidity of their movement, being deprived of brightness, was almost furtive. He did not press the question, taking her last remark as a piece of advice, as indeed it was intended. Then they sat waiting, until the silence became oppressive. Suddenly Easton spoke with a return of the quaint narrative manner which she remembered as characteristic.





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"One evening," he said, "as we were steaming down the Baltic last week—a dull warm evening, Tuesday, I guess—I was standing at the stern-rail with my arms beneath my chin when something fell upon my sleeve. I looked at it curiously, for I had not seen such a thing for years. It was a tear—most singular! I feel like crying now, Miss Winter; I should like to sit down on that low chair in the corner there and—cry. There are some disappointments that come like the disappointments of childhood—when it rained on one's birthday and put a stop to the picnic."

Miss Winter said nothing. She merely sat in her attentive attitude and looked at him with sympathetic eyes.

"It shows," he continued, presently, "how entirely one may be mistaken in one's own destiny. I never should have considered myself to be the sort of person into whose life a catastrophe was intended to break."

She still allowed him to continue, and after a pause he took advantage of her silence.

"Some men," he went on, "expect to have other lives upon their conscience—military officers, ship-captains, engine-drivers—but their own lives are more or less at equal stake, and the risk is allowed for in their salary, or is supposed to be. I have thirty lives set down on the debit side of my account, and some of those lives are chips off my own."

"Thirty?" questioned Miss Winter. "There were only eighteen men on board, all told."

"Yes; but there were others. I shall tell you when Miss Grace comes. It is not a story that one cares to relate more often than necessary."

They had not long to wait. In a few moments they heard the sound of the front-door bell. Easton rose from his seat. He did not go toward the door, but stood in the middle of the room, looking rather breathlessly toward Miss Winter. She it was who moved to the door and opened it, going out to the head of the stairs to meet Helen.

"Dear," he heard her say, and her voice was smooth and sweet, "Mr. Easton is here; he has come back."

There was no answer, and a moment later Helen Grace stood before him. As he took the hand she stretched out to him with an air almost of bravado, he saw at once the difference hinted at by Miss Winter. It lay in the expression of her face, it hovered in her eyes. It was not recklessness, for educated women are rarely reckless, and yet it savoured of defiance—defiance of something—perhaps of the years that lay ahead. It is to be seen in most ball-rooms, and the faces carrying it are usually beautiful. The striking characteristic of such women is their impregnability. One cannot get at them. One may quarrel with them, make love to them, put them under an obligation, and never know them better.

They may be sister, friend, even wife, and yet no companion. That effect of an immovable barrier never allows itself to be forgotten. And if you meet such women, though you may be unable to define it, that barrier will make itself felt. It was placed, riveted, dovetailed, cemented by the Past—a Past in which you had no part whatever. Such a look usually goes with a perfect dress, faultless carriage, and an impeccable *savoir-faire*. And Matthew Mark Easton recognized it at once, for he had lived and moved among such women, although the feminine influence in his home-life had been small.

"I am glad, Miss Grace," he said, "that you have done me the honour of coming."

And she smiled exactly as he expected—the hard inscrutable smile, which never betrays, and is never infectious. She did not, however, trust herself so far as to speak. There was silence for a moment—such a silence and such a moment as leave their mark upon the entire life. Easton breathed hard. He had no doubt at that time that he was bringing to each of these women news of the man she loved.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### SALVAGE

At last he resolutely broke the silence.

"It is a long story," he said. "Will you sit down?"

Both obeyed him so mechanically and so rapidly that he had no time to prepare his words, and he hesitated.

"I—I have to tell you," he said, "that there is no news of the ship. She sailed from London three years and seven months ago. She was sighted by the whaler *Martin* on the third of May, three years ago, in the Greenland Sea, since when there is no word of her. It is the opinion of all the experts whom I have consulted that the vessel was crushed by ice, possibly a few weeks after she was sighted. Her crew and her officers have perished."

"You give us," said Miss Winter, "the opinions of others. What is your own?"

"Mine," he said, after a pause; "mine is the same. There is no reason to suppose—there is no hope whatever."

"I gave that up two years ago," Helen stated, simply.

Easton made no comment; but presently he drew from his pocket some thin books, which

he opened, disclosing that they were maps and charts.

"I will," he said, "explain to you the theory. Here where this date is written is the spot where the ship was spoken by the whaler. She was sailing in this direction. It is probable that she passed Spitzbergen in safety, although there was ice as far south as this thin blue line; this I have since ascertained. After passing Spitzbergen they would keep to the north. I take it that at this spot they entered the broken ice, and in all probability they were beset. There were at the beginning of June four separate gales of wind from the southwest. During one or other of these gales the ship was possibly crushed. Whether the crew had time to take to the ice and land provisions and boats, or whether it was sudden, is a matter of conjecture. But I am quite certain that every effort to save life, everything that was seamanlike and courageous, was done. It failed. We have all failed. Never was so complete an expedition fitted up. The officers were young, but they were good men, and for Arctic work young men are a *sine qua non*. What they lacked in experience of ice-work was supplied by their subordinate officers, who were carefully selected men. I can only add that I am truly sorry I did not go with them. I have discovered that the doctors were wrong. I could have stood the work, for I have done so, and harder."

He paused, bending over the chart, which he opened more fully, until it covered the whole table. He seemed to be thinking deeply, or perhaps choosing his words. The ladies waited for him to continue.

"You see," he went on, "that all this is conjecture; but I have something else to tell you—something which is not a matter of conjecture. But first I must ask you to—assure me—that it goes no further. It must be a secret sacred to ourselves, for it is the secret of two men who—well, who know more than we do now."

"Of course," said Miss Winter.

"Of course," echoed Helen.

He went on at once, as if anxious to show his perfect reliance in their discretion.

"This expedition," he said, "was not despatched to discover the Northeast passage. It had quite another purpose, and I have determined that in justice to my two friends you must be told. But Admiral Grace must not know. There is a political side to the question which would render his position untenable if he knew. At present the history of this generation is not yet dry—it is like a freshly-written page, and one cannot yet determine what will stand out upon it when all the writing is equally developed. But there is a huge blot, which will come out very blackly in the hereafter. When this century is history all the world will wonder why Europe was so blind to the internal condition of its



greatest country. I mean Russia. It is not far from England, and yet we know more of Russia over in America than you do here. It is a long story, and we are only at the beginning of it yet; but there can only be one end. You have perhaps heard of the Nihilists, and you possibly judge them by their name. You possibly think that they are atheists, iconoclasts, miscreants. They are none of these things. They are merely a political party. They are a party of men fighting the bravest uphill fight that has been attempted. Of course there is an extreme party, the Terrorists, who, driven to despair by heartless cruelty, thirsting for revenge, or blindly impatient at the slowness of their progress, resort to violent measures. But the Nihilists must no more be judged from the Terrorist examples than your English Liberals must be confounded with Radicals."

Easton had left the table where the charts were spread. As he spoke he moved from side to side of the hearth-rug, dragging his feet through the worn fur. He warmed to his work as he pleaded the cause for which he had laboured so hard, and it must be remembered that his diction was quick, almost to breathlessness,—the rapid speech of an orator, which is hardly recognizable when set down in sober black and white.

"These men," he continued, "have received singularly little help from other countries, which is accounted for by the fact that the suppression

of news in Russia is an art. It is so difficult to learn the truth that most people are content with the falsehoods disseminated by the Government. But it is a singular fact that all who have studied the question, all who have lived in Russia and know anything whatever of the country, sympathize fully with the Nihilists. The contest is quite one-sided—between intellect and reckless courage on the one hand, and brutal unreasoning despotism on the other."

He paused for a moment, and then went on in a humbler tone, as if deprecating the introduction of his own personality into this great question.

"I," he said, "have given half my life to this question, and Tyars—he knew a lot about it. Together we worked out a scheme for aiding the escape of a number of the most gifted Nihilists—men and women—who had been exiled to Siberia, who were dragging out a miserable felon's existence at the mines for no other crime than the love of their own country. Our intention was not political, it was humane. We did not wish to rescue the Nihilists, but the individuals, that they might live in comparative happiness in America. Tyars and I clubbed together and supplied the funds. I was debarred from going—forbidden by the doctors—please never forget that. But Tyars was the best man for the purpose to be found anywhere, and his subordinate officer, Oswin Grace, was even better than

Tyars in his position. A rendezvous was fixed at the mouth of the Yana river—here on the map—and a date was named. Three Russians were despatched from London to aid in the escape. They did their share. The party arrived at the spot fixed, but the ship—the *Argo*—never reached them. I have been there. I have seen the dead bodies of nine men—one of whom, Sergius Pavloski, I knew—lying there. They are waiting for the great Assize, when judgment shall be given. I was quite alone, for I expected to find something, and so no one knows. The secret is quite safe, for the keenest official in Siberia would never connect the attempted escape of a number of Nihilists with the despatch of a private English Arctic expedition, even if the bodies are ever found. There were no records—I searched."

He stopped somewhat suddenly, with a jerk, as a man stops in the narration of something which has left an ineffaceable pain in his life. After a little pause he returned to the table and slowly folded the ragged maps. The manner in which he did so betrayed an intimate knowledge of each frayed corner; but the movements of his fingers were stiff and awkward. There was a suggestion of consciousness in his every action; his manner was almost that of a cripple attempting to conceal his deformity. Helen was watching him.

"And you," she inquired gently; "you have endured great hardships?"

He folded the maps and placed them in the breast-pocket of his coat.

"Yes," he answered, without meeting her eyes, "I have had a bad time of it."

They waited, but he said nothing more. That was the history of the last two years. Presently Helen Grace rose to go. She appeared singularly careless of detail. Part of the news she had learnt was old, the remainder was too fresh to comment upon. She kissed Miss Winter, shook hands with Matthew Mark Easton, and quickly left the room. Easton did not sit down again. He walked to the window, and standing there waited till Helen Grace had left the house, then he watched her as she crossed the road.

"These English ladies," he said, reflecting aloud, "are wonderful. They are like very fine steel."

When he turned he found Miss Winter standing beside the empty fireplace. Her attitude was scarcely an invitation for him to prolong his visit, such as might have been conveyed by the resumption of a seat.

"That," he said, buttoning his coat over the maps, "is why I did not go farther than the Yana river."

She smiled a little wearily.

"It was a wild enterprise," she said.

"I should like to try it again."

"Then it was not impossible?"

"No," he answered, "it was not impossible."

She reflected for some moments.

"Then why did it not succeed?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"There is one obstacle," he answered at length, choosing his words with an unusual deliberation, "mentioned casually after others in bills of lading, policies of insurance, and other maritime documents—'the hand of God.' I surmise this was that Hand . . . and I admit that it is heavy."

"I always felt," said Miss Winter, musingly, "that something was being concealed from us."

"At one time I thought you knew all about it."

Miss Winter turned and looked at him in surprise.

"You once warned us against the Russian minister."

She thought for some moments, recalling the incident.

"Yes," she said at length, "I remember. It was the merest accident. I suspected nothing."

"Concealment," pleaded the American, "was absolutely necessary. It made no difference to the expedition, neither added to the danger nor detracted from it. But I did not want Miss Grace and yourself to think that these two men had thrown away their lives in attempting such a futile achievement as the Northeast passage. They were better men than that."

She smiled a little wearily.

"No one will ever suspect," she said; "for even now that you have told me the story I can scarcely realize that it is true. It sounds like some tale of bygone days; and yet we have a living proof that it is all true, that it has all happened."

"Helen Grace . . ." he suggested.

She nodded her head.

"Of course you knew."

"Yes," he answered, briefly.

"And did you know about him?"

He did not reply at once, but glanced at her keenly.

"I knew that he loved her," was the answer.

She had never resumed her seat, and he took her attitude in the light of a dismissal. He made a little movement and mechanically examined the lining of his hat.

"Are you going to stay in England?" she asked.

"No;" and he offered her his hand; "I am going back to America for some years, at all events."

They shook hands and he moved toward the door.

"When you come back to England," she said, in rather a faint voice, "will you come and see me?"

He turned sharply.

"Do you mean that, Miss Winter?"

"Yes."

His quick dancing glance was flitting over her whole person.

"If I do come," he said, with a sudden relapse into Americanism, "I surmise it will be to tell you something else—something I thought I never should tell you."

She stood quite still and never raised her eyes.

"Do you still mean it?"

She gave a little nod. The door-handle rattled in his grasp, as if his hand were unsteady.

"I thought," he said, slowly, "that it was Oswin Grace."

"No."

"Never?" he inquired, sharply.

"Never."

"Then I stay in England."

And he closed the door again.

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